WALT WHITMAN AND THE SIKH INSPIRATION

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PREFACE

"A morning glory at my window satisfied me more than the metaphysics of book."

This line of Walt Whitman flings open the door through which one can pass from him to the House of Guru Nanak who appeared in the Punjab 450 years ago as a great light that extinguished the metaphysical darkness which had made the people of India hopeless prisoners. The heavy chains of iron sounded on their hands and feet, and they were made to hear in them the sweet sounds of the temple bells. Such was their self-hypnotism, induced by a diabolical social system inaugurated with fiendish cleverness by the Brahmanical law-givers. The Brother *Gurdas* of the Sikh persuasion says, "For ages the doors of true spirituality were locked for the people; the great Guru flung them open to all the four castes." I find the poetic spirit of Walt almost identical with the Sikh spirit. I have not made the text heavy by the stale process of documenting it. I have been in close touch with the Sikh spirit of life and literature for a whole life now, and I write on the authority of my subliminal impression of this great correspondence. At times, the fundamental words and phrases are alike. It is not so much mental similarity as the psychic unity of the soul-consciousness underlying Sikh literature and *Leaves of Grass*, that has struck me. If I have not been able to fully express my subliminal impressions in the following paragraphs, it is surely not due to my not knowing the texts of the Sikh songs, that could have been brought together to prove them, but solely to the fact that I desire to give the necessary freedom of truth to my personal impressions.

I owe thanks to Messrs Macmillan & Co., London for their permission to use a few quotations from Mr. Bailey's *Walt Whitman* published in the "English Men of Letters" series.

PURAN SINGH

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of exhuming literary manuscripts that have been gathering dust in family attics and boxes for generations is at once so fascinating and intriguing as to suggest an aesthetic of resurrection. Surely, something in their pitch and grain bespeaks a certain dynamics, and warrants an upsurge and an airing. Usually this coincides with changes in literary taste and in the *zeitgeist*. Occasionally, however, a manuscript turns up like a prodigal to claim lineage and identity, when it's all but forgotten. In most such cases, there is nearly always a desire to pay homage to an established celebrity, and the manuscript in question often involves a certain amount of sentiment and nostalgia, if not indulgence Of course, ultimately, it must earn its credentials on its own strength, though, as an offspring of a great parent, it claims and compels attention, as of right. It's with some such thoughts that we place *Walt Whitman and the Sikh Inspiration* before the reading public in the year of Puran Singh's birth centenary.

Completed in 1928, three years before the death of the poet, the manuscript[1] has, for various reasons, remained nestling inside that huge mass of papers which an enlightened and revering family has preserved with loving care, and bequeathed to the Punjabi University. Now that its hour of recognition has come, we feel gratified. There is perhaps a divinity that shapes the fortunes of such manuscripts !

In certain respects, *Puran Singh and the Sikh Inspiration* is a unique manuscript. It can have few *confreres* in the vast imperium

1. It comprised 89 typed pages (corrected by the poet, himself) and 22 pages in long hand. The final chapter, "The Nascent Spirit of Poesy," which covers some of Puran Singh's favourite lines from Walt Whitman shows a bold and upright scrawl full of deletions and insertions.

of letters. Seldom, indeed, has a poet, separated by race, time and country, left behind such an eloquent and soulful tribute to another poet in the fulness of his heart, and in the urgency of his imagination. For what Puran Singh claims in these pages is not the American poet's 'influence' as such, but something far deeper and far higher, something that, in a manner, transcends description. To him, Walt Whitman appears as a poetic prophet whose spirit has passed on into his own, and who leads him into that 'great good place' where kindred souls disport themselves in mystic delight and companionship. In short, Puran Singh is suggesting something of the idea of poetic reincarnation and apostolic succession. This is a far cry from the idea of mere 'influence', which Harold Bloom, for instance, examines in such a recondite and pedantic manner in *The Anxiety of Influence*. In Bloom's theory of poetry, a strong poet is obliged to destroy or repudiate his poetic 'father' in order to create an imaginative "space" for himself. There may be something in this Freudian concept,[2] but it comes a cropper when we apply it to the relationship between poets like Puran Singh and Whitman. Here, on the contrary, we have the case of a poet who, born in a wholly different culture and tradition and writing in a radically different tongue, finds an epiphanic experience when he happens to come across a verse that lights up his entire *soulscape*. Here is no unconscious 'slaying' of the 'pater' poet, but a conscious surrender before a Master, or a Guru ! Indeed, such a surrender becomes the *condition* of his song and craft.

Anyone going through this monograph will at once notice that it's not really a critique on Whitman's poetry or poetics. There is little here of what we call literary criticism. Of all the classical and modern critical approaches, there's not one that will answer our purpose. We have virtually no biographical, historical, sociological, psychological, rhetorical or textual insights applied to Whitman's verse here. All we have is one breathless song in

2. Even Whitman himself says in *Song of Myself*:
He most honours my style,
who learns under it to destroy the teacher.

prose in praise of another song so puissant as to turn back all text-book criticism to its own linear or horizontal tracks ! Puran Singh, indeed, makes light of all theorizings and all extended explications. For him, as for Whitman, to analyse a poem is to violate it, is to spill its riches in the dust. A great poem is like a tender Eastern bride, and none may lift the veil, but her Lord and Master !

While such a mystic *rapport* is clearly stipulated by Puran Singh, he frequently calls Whitman by his Christian name, as though he were a town friend, a daily sharer of ambrosial airs and drinks at a common tavern. At times, he calls out his Walt across the continents—a call from the Punjab plains to the American prairies, where the great dreaming heart of America still beats in song and story. It's as though Puran Singh, having heard the "barbaric yawp," answers back in the rich and rugged and dulcet accents of the Punjabi tongue. It's the deep calling unto the deep, and, to use John Masefield's memorable lines, it's "a wide call and a clear call that may not be denied."

What, however, constitutes the *raison d'etre* of this strange, *sui generis* composition is Puran Singh's astounding belief that Walt Whitman is "the Guru's Sikh born in America" ! Almost everything about the American poet—his God-intoxication and mystic fervour, his egalitarian vision, his revolutionary ethics, his love of the human body and of all animals and sentient beings, his inebriation with things, places and persons, his catalogues and names and repetitions, his celebration of the road, the sword and the steed, his welcome of the new forces of science, electricity and technology, and finally, even his leonine face, flowing locks and patriarchal beard—suggests such a description. And to prove that he's not being facetious or fanciful, Puran Singh goes on, page after page, to quote parallel lines and passages from the Sikh scriptures and Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Even if we take his enthusiasm as something tending to Oriental extravagance, we are left with the impression that he has had some glimpses of the American "camerado" which are of a different order and pitch. Let him, by all means,

call Walt what he pleases; it's an affair of the heart and the soul, and we may leave the matter there. He has deciphered the great hieroglyphic hand of America. If Whitman's form makes him out a magnificent, burly Sikh, be it so in Puran Singh's 'excited reverie.'[3] Elsewhere[4], I have discussed, more critically and extensively, the question of the Whitman–Puran Singh affinities, but here it may not be out of place to recall briefly some of the relevant ideas. Puran Singh himself, as I have said above, is least interested in such exercises, and it's enough for him to say about Whitman, "We have taken strolls in each other's company in the gardens of the Beautiful" ! After such knowledge, what criticism ! Ah, but that's a poet's way, and though we must pay the price to get inside that "garden," we may view the drama of these two psyches from without as well !

Even to an ordinary eye, the resemblance between Walt and Puran Singh as persons and poets is so striking that one cannot resist the temptation to see them linked in a kind of spiritual compact. Indeed, no two poets in any part of the world, to my mind, have ever shown the kind of numinous correspondence that exists between these two poets. It may perhaps be truer to say that they were two cognate souls converging, as though by some hidden code and design, on the same beam or wave-length. Or, to change the metaphor, they were two sovereigns from the same mint, struck to mark some special phenomenon or occurrence ! Otherwise, it's difficult to explain the nature of the identity we witness in this case. We may even

3. If Puran Singh had been alive today, the spectacle and pageantry of over a hundred thousand American Sikhs, complete with hair and beards and other Sikh symbols, intonating hymns from the Gurus, would have thrilled him no end ! Did he, perchance, have a dream whose hour came half a century hence through the grace of Yogi Harbhajan Singh ?

4. See (i) "Walt Whitman and Puran Singh : A Study in Literary Affinities" in *Variations on American Literature* edited by Darshan Singh Maini (USEFI, New Delhi, 1968).
(ii) "Puran Singh : Toward A Whitmanesque Vision" in *Studies in Punjabi Poetry* by Darshan Singh Maini (Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979).

go on to style Puran Singh as Whitman's surrogate or alter-ego in the language of modern criticism, but this, in no way, fully accounts for that unique *camaraderie* which draws them together inside a charmed circle, so to speak. It's interesting to note that when Puran Singh chanced upon a copy of *Leaves of Grass* in the year 1901 during his stay in Tokyo, he was already "simmering, simmering, simmering." Whitman brought him "to a boil" in the same manner that Emerson had done in his own regard. Barely 20 at that time, Puran Singh, then full of the high dream of life, was so completely overwhelmed that he was never the same man again. Whitman had altered his sensibility in a profoundly radical manner. The young Sikh scholar could never forget the moment when an American friend had put Whitman's book into his hands. That was a moment of moments; it had the character of destiny and divinity for him. Till his last breath, he nursed this tender and inviolate relationship.

Later, when Puran Singh evolved his own poetics and style in consonance with his Oriental and Sikh urges, he discovered a remarkable identity of interests between himself and Whitman. Their views on the subject of poetry and the poet, their ineluctable drift in the direction of *vers libre*, their apotheosis of word *qua* word, their disregard of all classical canons and codicils—all these amounted to a common or shared vision of poetry. A poet in their view was not just a registering consciousness, or an experiencing psyche; he was, above all, a roused sensibility in whom the word became *Logos* in the act of creation. As Puran Singh put it, "None is ranked as a poet whose flesh is not scented with the perfume of God."

To those not familiar with Puran Singh's Punjabi verse'[5], it

5. Puran Singh's poetry in English comprises the following :
1. *The Sisters of the Spinning Wheel and Other Sikh Poems*, (J.m. Dent, London, 1921).
2. *Unstrung Beads*, (J.M. Dent, London, 1923).
3. *Nargas* by Bhai Vir Singh translated by Puran Singh (J. M. Dent, London, 1924).

[*Cont. on page xii*

should be revealing to note the titles of his volumes of verse. All his three collections—*Khule Maidan* or "*The Open Wide Plains*," *Khule Ghund* or "The Open Veils" and *Khule Asmani Rāng* or "The Wide Blue Skies"—carry the key-word, *khule*, which in the Punjabi tongue means at once open and wide and spacious. Translated into English, the word that comes closest to the thought and feeling of Puran Singh is *amplitude*. And we know that Whitman's poetry is full of the feeling of amplitude. The dazzle and sparkle of life and the infinite riches of this our earth and home, and the opulence of existence and the spread and sprawl of things—all this is subsumed in the expression. Apropos of titles, Puran Singh makes some fresh and insightful comments in relation to Whitman's poems in this monograph. "Sometimes, the titles of his poems" he writes, "are, in themselves, greater poems than the lines bound like a golden sheaf of ripe wheat ears below. Then, the title is poetry, and the lines, but the daily bread."

And finally, a word about the *character* of the volume. Some years ago, I undertook to edit and collate a volume of Puran Singh's poems in English, *Guru Gobind Singh . Reflections and Offerings*. What the poet had left behind was a manuscript so hopelessly jumbled up, so imperiously resistant to line and discipline that the editorial process was both an ordeal and a challenge. However, given the charter to do what I liked with it, I sought to preserve the aroma, colour and shape of the poet's thought in the midst of all my struggles with his idiom, grammar and style. I quote at some length from the "Foreword" to that volume : "The manuscript, as might be expected was in keeping with the *elan* of Professor Puran Singh's spirit—a mass of inter-locked musings, outpourings and offerings. There was hardly any order in the tangled skeins forming the incipient tapestry, but

(*Cont. from page xi*)

4. *Guru Gobind Singh : Reflections and Offerings* edited by Darshan Singh Maini with an Introductory Essay (The Sikh Centre of the San Francisco Bay Area, 1967).
5. *The Bride of the Sky*, (Punjabi University, Patiala, 1976).
6. *The Temple Tulips* (Punjabi University, Patiala, 1980).

when has genius cared for the needle and the thread ? He appeared to be impatient with the mechanics and trappings of things. It was, indeed, a prodigal hand that tossed up a heap of coloured marbles; it was for us to sketch a mosaic, or to build a montage. A harvest of song and spark, it had to be winnowed, washed and carefully preserved." I trust, something of the spirit of that volume abides even here in this manuscript. However, the task this time was much easier. The typescript, on the whole, read fairly smoothly, and even the pages in long hand were in good shape and condition. Also, the assignment stipulated a complete integrity of the text.[6] And this, I have done, both in letter and spirit. Even as I have corrected the text and the typescript, I have preserved the peculiar whimsies and their lyrical charm. As I have said earlier, this kind of criticism—if, indeed, we must call it that way—is not likely to please some. This strange *melange* of comment, quotation, anecdote and lyricism may not draw more than an indulgent nod from the critics and the *cognoscenti*. However, we trust, it has its own value and validity. At any rate, it opens up a small, new, secret "passage" to Whitman's sanctum. There is incense, and there is genuflexion, and there are flowers and filigree and festoons in all this business, but surely, the ceremony of composition, needs no less when the dialogue is with the gods and the muses themselves.

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6. Thus, the views expressed in this manuscript are not necessarily the views of the publishers, or of the Editor, whatever the quiddities of expression and the idiosyncrasies of idiom and style.
7. Among other things, I have largely retained Puran Singh's use of capital letters.

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I

AN APPRECIATION

The Sikh Spirit And The Personality Of Walt Whitman

It was in Tokio in the year 1901 that an American friend gave me a copy of *Leaves of Grass*. For all these years, I have had it with me. Many times during this period of twentyseven years, an age that we have passed together, we have taken strolls in each other's company in the gardens of the Beautiful.

During these years, I came home like the prodigal son, and understood that real life is not in the mercurial restlessness of the senses, nor in the conceptual architectures and mental craftsmanship of philosophic speculation, nor in the achievements of power and pelf, of body or mind, but *in simple living that trusts unknown destinies of life. Gladsome and voiceless obedience idealised in simple deeds and thoughts of daily life is the creed of my Sikh ancestors to whom I have returned.* We are for the spontaneous coming of age of the divine personality of man, and like Walt Whitman, we regard "everything in God's Universe with wonder, reverence, acceptance and love". The Door of the House of Guru Nanak has since been mercifully flung open to me; I have been, again, admitted into that sanctum. And the intellectual restlessness of "why" and "wherefore", of the

will-o'-the-wispish illusion of the "little I" of man, which lures him away from the real centre of life, must be put off and placed at the door of the shrine just as one places one's clothes on the river-bank before dipping for a sun-lit bath in the rushing waters of grace. Naked and alone, the novice enters the Sikh shrine. He is baptised with fire and sword. He is redressed as a fully-armed soldier. His whole life thenceforward, is dedicated. He gives himself away. "I am of Him the Glorious One".

Both man and woman are as pilgrims on the Path. The Sikh has no sect. His commune, as ordained by the Guru, is his Path. I may almost say, it's an open road to Perfection. Perfection we know comes in upon us men, as spring comes to the trees. As Emerson says, "All spiritual progress is through lyrical glances". We know, in a winking, in a glance, is vouchsafed to us that perfection. The Perfected Man is all our knowledge of the eternal. We wish to imbibe the infinitude of the Glory of the Beautiful through the inspiration of the Perfect Man. And that man is his embodiment of the Logos, no less; he has transcended *maya* of the animal and man world, nothing more. He is a fresh Fountain that flows with His Mercy, His Grace, His Divine Friendship.

Man can understand nothing but himself. And all the upward struggle is to find his essence, "I am seeking the Man of God somewhere," said Guru Nanak in reply to those who were seeking in vain the ideal of Perfection in the caves, in magic and in various morbid kinds of mental constraints. It is only such a man that embodies *Nam* or Logos for us, and

there is nothing of man left in such a one.

To such a man, there would be unceasing wonder in this exquisitely beautiful expanse of the soul found in Nature. It is the sage convention of this House of the Guru that men and women must preserve their shapes whole : the Sikhs, the disciples, keep their tresses unshorn. The long beards must be allowed to flow like veritable rivers of mercy. I feel that in this convention there is a metaphorical attunement of man's inner life with the soul of Nature, almost in a sub-conscious manner.

The life of today's modern man has climbed out of its depths, and consequently lost its nobler purposes; it is mostly skating on the surfaces of things. To us it seems, the ship of man has struck the reefs in the shallow waters of intellectual comprehensions of the immediate, and on the sun-bathed shore, sits the ship-wrecked humanity in sad and empty helplessness, with a miserable swarm of flies sitting on their faces and hands. Those breezes of the infinite that filled their sails once, whilst they ploughed through the main, the swarm of golden birds hovering over their masts, the sun rising out of the sea right in their breasts and setting in their sails, the sky arching, the sea roaring, and the danger and the depth of it all—these are all dreams of a past spent world. They are lying already exhausted by the finitude of things, and are almost dead on the sands like the fish taken out of waters.

So on this Golden Door of the Guru, I have learnt that this restlessness of the modern man and woman which prides itself on having parted from the

super-stitions of the old religion is but a death of the soul There is noble repose in Obedience; there is simplicity of faith and beauty of the day in Trust of Him. As John Knox would lift his one foot while walking and say "glory", and lift the other and say "glory", or as a Bahai preacher of Persia, fond of his guide and philosopher and friend, Baha, (meaning "*light*") would speak on a public platform, but taking breath of remembrance after every little utterance and say, "Baha, Baha', we the Sikhs must cry like birds the Name of our Beloved, and rush forth on our wings into the Infinite, filling it with our voices. The rivers and fires and winds take up our anthems, and we hear them singing in chorus with us. The Guru says, they are dead who are not songstrung in love of the soul.

What use is running through life at the merciless speed of 200 miles a minute ? In infinite leisure of the soul, as vast as the spread of the sky, is the joy of living. There is an eternity full of that whole joy of which our best pleasures and comforts are but a miserable fraction. Crowding up, hurrying in like a swarm of sardines in a little pool is no progress. Progress towards what ? When the soul is lost, what is the analytical intellect of the world seeking to gain ?

Leave that trash of the modern choice. Come with me here where I have rediscovered the pulse of the universe beating in wonderful sympathy with the life of the Guru's disciples. And it is only here, sitting by me that you would also discover the secret of that beautiful wild abandon of the leisure-loving Walt Whitman "loafing" on the sands in the full glare of

the sun. Curiously enough, he has also, at last, let his beard flow like a miniature Niagra. His tuft of silver hair is speeding like a little glacier from the Rockies. This man in shape and in thought and in sympathy is verily a Sikh. I lay claim to him as brother born in the same cultural climate. I, who as a Sikh, have read somewhat of the written Word and Lives of the Gurus that appeared in the Punjab, find Walt Whitman, at times, translating the Sikh thought and spiritual experience with a wondrous liberty. Finding so much of the Sikh voice and inspiration in his chant, I desire not to trace mere similarities, but the central and essential identity of his spirit with that of the Sikh. His life-story, as of an American citizen, is best told in his own words. People are fond of writing long biographies of others and of themselves. They know not that the history of the soul cannot be written thus. It is a great thing to remember that the best biography of a poet is his mode of life as expressed in his poems and sayings. Thus, Walt Whitman writes a few words about himself, and leaves the world to his poems and writings as his best biography.

The autobiographical note in his own handwriting is appended to Mr. Mackay's edition of *Leaves of Grass* published by Siegle Hill & Co, and runs thus :

> That he was born at West Hills in 1819 May 31. Continued at West Hills for the year 20, 21, 22 and 23. In 1824 moved to Brooklyn, went to public school, 1831 tended in lawyer's office. Then a Doctor's. In 1834 went into printing office to learn type-setting. In 1839 he took to

teaching work in country school in Suffolk. He starts a weekly paper "The Long Islander." He returns to New York and devotes himself to printing and journalistic work. In 1846-47 takes to editing "The Eagle" Newspaper in Brooklyn. In 1848, he joins the staff of "The Crescent." He travels south and north west of America. In 1850; he is back as a publisher of "The Freeman" Newspaper in Brooklyn. He takes to building houses and selling them as a business. The first edition of *Leaves of Grass* is issued in 1855. In 1856 second and enlarged edition. In 1860 the third and fourth edition. In 1865, he gets an appointment as a Departmental clerk In 1867, he publishes the fourth edition of *Leaves of Grass*. In 1873, he is prostrated by paralysis at Washington due to his most strenuous work he did in the hospitals and the hard struggle for earning his bread he had to put in throughout his days on this earth. In 1882, David Mackay of Philadelphia published the eighth edition of *Leaves of Grass*. And also a prose and autobiographical volume entitled "Specimen Days". In 1888 Mr. Whitman is now in his 70th year. He is almost entirely disabled physically, through the paralysis from his persistent army hospital labours in 1863-64 but is now just printing, we hear, a little volume of additional prose and verse called "November Boughs". He resides in Nickle Street, Camden, New Jersey."

He died on March 27, 1892.

The Guru's song was being sung by thousands in

the Punjab over the last 450 years. I am not very much of a theosophist, but it may be all true, that behind the screen of this visible world, there is a world from where great men come. From the striking identity of Whitman's spirit with the spirit of the Sikh, I do feel as though a Sikh of the Guru had slipped out to America from behind the screen to plant the Guru's ideals for the future humanity in the New Soil. It is democracy, and yet it is aristocracy. It is the individual; yet it is the multitudes. It is love of man; yet it is love of God As the sun lights the universe, let a man be born. He will fill the heart of the whole humanity with that sweetness which makes it rapturously selfless, and goes to function in this universe as does all Nature. Perhaps, the Sikhs know more of the secret of Walt's personality than anyone else

There is a vitality-giving power in his poems and in his chants. And this energy comes from his personality. His contemporaries bear evidence to this quality of his person, which we in the East prize above everything else. It is the quality of vitalising life by a silent inspiration that passes from the man of God to the other in a glance. Such men partake of the fountains of life, and there is always a fresh sparkle of life in their eyes. The thirsty are refreshed, and the weary find rest in them. If there is anything precious in our life in a the East, it is these radium particles of soul that the jewellers of the East carry with them, and they roam about disguised as unrecognised wanderers, for who can really evaluate them ? It is therefore with secret pleasure of some soul-realisa-

tion coming anew to us from America, that we read the accounts of Whitman's personal influence on those who met him, indicative of that great worth which we insist our poets should have, and without which worth, we, in the East, do not feel enthusiastic enough to go forth and acknowledge mere rhyme-makers, poem-singers, dancers, and drama-writers, even as omniscient as Shakespeare himself, as our poets ! He is not a poet who cannot accompany us in the journey of our soul beyond death. The dancers get stale when kept overnight. The poets that are mere artists and revel in the architectural designs of the sound of words, may well be in their gilt-edged volumes on our desks. We can, at times, take them out of the shelf, dust the covers and rearrange them. Let them lie in peace !

Mr. John Bailey refers to the personal influence of Walt as follows :-

"We have seen that men like John Symonds, and York Powel spoke of him as an influence comparable with that of the Bible. Less remarkable men who came in closer contact with him used still stronger language. All through his life, his personality had an extraordinary effect upon people. Sometimes it irritated, repelled. But often, it fascinated even passing visitors in a degree to which it would not be easy to find a parallel. Sir Edmund Gosse, no facile hero-worshipper, went to see him unwillingly and was astonished at the "peculiar magic", he could exercise "not on a disciple but on a stiff-necked and forward unbeliever" so that the unbeliever walked away, after a brief talk, with his "heart full of

affection for the beautiful old man". Sir Edmund's word is, as usual the right one. Only something like "magic" seems adequate to account for the spiritual intoxication which Whitman seems to have more than once produced. His friend, Dr. Bucke, says that "no description can give any idea of the extraordinary physical attractiveness of the man", and he tells a story of a youngman, who saw him for a single time in 1877, only heard him utter about a hundred quite ordinary words, and yet according to the young man's own account, "shortly after leaving, a state of exaltation set in which he could only describe by comparing it to a slight intoxication of champagne or to falling in love". And this lasted six weeks, during which he was plainly different from his ordinary self, with the result that Whitman became a permanent force in his life "making for purity and happiness". So an English doctor who visited him in 1890 records an almost parallel impression. He speaks of the "irresistible magnetism" of Whitman's sweet aromatic presence which seemed to exhale sanity, purity and naturalness, and exercised over him an attraction which positively astonished him, producing an exaltation of mind and soul which no man's presence ever did before. So in some cases, even when the previous impression gathered from the *Leaves* had been unfavourable, as with the naturalist John Burough, his actual contact with the man produced an immediate change. Burough describes the first and last impression of him as "wonderfully gentle, tender and benignant", which reminds us of Moncure Conway's testimony that he never "heard from those lips a word

of irritattion or depreciation of any being." We are scarcely surprised to find Burough adding that "he always had the look of a man who had just taken a bath", and declaring that his literary friends sought him chiefly to "bask in his physical and psychical sunshine" An other interesting remark made by Burough is that "his face has none of the eagerness, sharpness, nervousness of the modern face," Like "the faces of the Greeks," it expressed "repose, harmony and command", while the large and loose mouth expressed another side of his nature and "required the check and curb of that classic brow".

Those of us who, in the present Punjab, have had the good luck to come into intimate contact with Bhai Vir Singh, the Sikh apostle, would find in the above summary adequate words to express their state of mind when they go to see him. Literally, we all go "to bask in his physical and psychical sunshine". This Sikh poet enables us to feel the spiritual warmth of the personality of Whitman and to claim him as one of us. Bhai Vir Singh, in his depressing environment of utter squalor and of the eternal enslavement of India around him, with no life but that shines in his own soul about him, sings in divine pitches of the devotee's personal songs addressed to his own Beloved in the strict privacy of His Chambers. Walt Whitman excited by the gigantic drive of human life in America has lost the aristocratic comeliness of line and word, characteristic of Bhai Vir Singh. In his oceanic outpour of his Disciple Spirit in glorifying the Creation, one has the restraint of a flower on a bed of dry thorns, and the other, the burst of a wild

freedom in a garden of great resources.

The products and creations of such geniuses as Bhai Vir Singh and Whitman are of different colours, as flowers differ in their beauty, but we in the Punjab, who have met the Sikh poet and touched him and heard him and sat with him and drunk tea with him, can appreciate the irresistible magnetism of his "sweet aromatic presence". And truly, as Sir Edmund Gosse says of Whitman, only something like "magic" seems adequate to account for the spiritual intoxication which Bhai Vir Singh has more than once produced in us. People sick of soul point their fingers at us who go there. "They go there for nothing. They do not become as good as he is", as if those who smitten by frost go and sit in the sun for a while can become suns !

And the poems of Walt are to be judged by first getting that inner comfort which makes his face beam as if he had just taken a bath. Unless he who goes to evaluate Whitman has that amount of passive quality to receive the "psychic sunshine" as Walt is capable of giving, let me say frankly, all criticism of his work shall be lifeless. Walt Whitman writes poems, if I may be permitted to say so, in the spirit of an old mother feeding his grandchild. At least, I know how my grandmother used to feed me. She sandwiched a morsel of bread with tender chicken meat and put into my little mouth and watched me as I chewed it, as I swallowed it. She looked at me, and her mouth remained quite open, lips apart, as if expecting me to put that morsel back into her mouth. And when I swallowed, she too swallowed with me. She closed

her mouth, pressed her lips as if she ate. And she actually ate, for I saw her making a visible effort to swallow some thing. Unless the critic comes as the grandmother and sees that the poems of Walt Whitman with broken edges and full at places, as they say of "incongruities and inequalities", are musically completed in the sympathy of the two sitting together, no criticisn can have any real value. One would realise that there is a greater perfection of art in the poetry of Whitman than in the individualised completeness of, say, a Tennyson. Whitman cannot live alone, while Tennyson is a poet who has nothing in common with the Creation and its objects. Walt Whitman's rhyme and metre are completed in the congregation of Nature and man, and they all rise to sing to the Highest under this starry canopy with their souls full of that unique gladness of life which is so sure. To bring the customary standards of rhyme and metre and measured words to judge these "billows of the sea" and the oceanic rhythm of the cosmic storm in a unique consciousness is to weigh the soul by measures of iron and gold. All those poets who are not instinct with the insanity of the immeasurable are miserable limitations on themselves. Despite the unpreparedness of Mr Bailey to evaluate Whitman's verse, he gives an excellent pen-picture of the poet at the end of his many good remarks.

More than any of these, as it seems to me, Whitman is the genius of America. And if that is so, no admitted limitations can justify his reglect by Europe. To be the voice of a nation is a great achievement, and the greater the nation, the greater, the

achievement. It may be plausibly argued that Whitman holds that glory in a unique degree. Is there a Greek who represents the whole of Greece, or a Frenchman who represents the whole of France, or an Englishman, even Shakespeare himself, who represents the whole of England, as Whitman represents the whole of the United States, and every man and woman of every class within its borders ?

Who has been a greater voice of the ideal which the word 'Democracy' tries to suggest ? How much saner and healthier, both physically and morally, he is than any Russian ? How much wider meaning he gives to the idea than could be given by such political orators as Bright ! How he towers, by imagination, by vision, by the joy of the body, by the joy of the soul over such a dull materialist as Marx ! Of what immeasureably finer and freer-flowing metal he is made than those mixtures of the cruel tyrant and the hollow doctrinaire whom we have seen during the last few years in Russia, cloaking his despotism with names stolen from the language of freedom, and democracy ! The only great democratic figure who can rival him as an embodiment of the true democratic faith is his own hero Lincoln who saw him from a window and asked who he was and said: 'Well he looks like a man" and, of whom, he, in his turn, said things unforgettable and immortal. Mr Bailey concludes his book on Walt Whitman affirming the poet's habit of regarding "everything in God's Universe, with wonder, reverence, acceptance and love". That is the mood we see him here; we cannot leave him in a better and a happier frame of mind. It

came upon him often in solitude; if others were with him when it came, he could not, as a lady, who knew him, records, be got to speak. It belonged, of course, to his innermost being, and was, no doubt, closely connected with that constant thankfulness which he once declared was "the best item" in his work. A strong "religious sentiment", which, as this witness and several others record, "pervaded and dominated" his whole life. That "religious sentiment", or religion, was not perhaps some thing that an ordinary man could comprehend.

"It made him love men—not mankind, but ordinary people of every day—as few men of any sort have loved them, and of men of genius, perhaps, fewest of all. It made not only in love, but also, in the other two gifts of Wordsworth's truly, in hope and admiration too. But admiration is too weak a word. He lived in wonder which, the wise man said was the beginning of religion."

Claiming him as one of our Hidden Brotherhood that gathers round the Throne of the Guru, I desire to write of him and of his poetry, which may not be altogether devoid of interest to both the admirers and detractors of Wait Whitman in the West.

II

THE PAST AND THE FUTURE MEET

The Children of Adam : A Savage Frankness

Let us start from our very first excursion. We together crossing the borders of Time went, clad in antelope skins, with a bow and arrrow in our hands, into the forests of India, where dwelt the progeny-fond Aryans who, in their turn, it was stated, had come from the Northern regions singing Sanskrit hymns. They loved to live surrounded by herds of kine, and they loved to see them graze on the soft grass growing on the fertile alluvial soil of the Gangetic plains. We stood on no ceremonies. We mingled straight away with these men and women. They were also free like their cattle. We danced to the chant of their *Veda-Mantrams* round the sacred fires that they were very fond of lighting, drinking *soma* juice and making merry. There was a savage frankness in that society and in those hymns. The recorded Sanskrit hymns on the creation of poets and prophets out of these free women, read like Whitman's "Children of Adam."

When the sun was setting, we roamed in those camps. It was a delight to hear Walt Whitman chanting to them in the same sonorous melody his "Children of Adam" poems in a sweet response to their homely lilts. They looked at each other in as-

tonishment, for Walt in that queer guise appeared to them the Future incarnate, and they were mystified how, they, the Past, were holding in their hands His hands—the Future. This Man of the Future, yet unborn, lived in their hymns and sprang out of them, for how could he express so vividly the philosophy of their robust lives in such a splendour of virtuous expression ? The Garden of Eden was yet on this earth; the Paradise was not yet lost. There was no false shame, smoking of sin, in frank fondness of man and woman to beget children. And not understanding his Manhattan language, they read out back to him in archaic melodious Sanskrit the meaning of what he had sung in the weird tunes of the future.

"A Woman Waits For Me"

"It is, I, you women, I make my way,
I am stern, acrid, large, undissuadable, but I love you,
I do not hurt you any more than is necessary for you,
I pour the stuff to start sons and daughters fit for these States, I press with slow, rude muscle,
I brace myself effectually, I listen to no entreaties,
I dare not withdraw till I deposit what has so long accumulated within me.
Through you, I drain the pent-up rivers of myself,
In you I wrap a thousand onward years,
On you I graft the grafts of the best-beloved of me and America,
The drops I distil upon you shall grow fierce and athletic girls, new artists, musicians and singers,

The babes I beget upon you are to beget babes in their turn,
I shall demand perfect men and women out of my love-spendings,
I shall expect them to interpenetrate with others, as I and you interpenetrate now,
I shall count on the fruits of the gushing showers of them, as I count on the fruits of the gushing showers I give now,
I shall look for loving crops from the birth, life, death, immortality,
I plant so lovingly now."

Indeed, there is in this chant, "The Children of Adam", that old primitive, somewhat, savage sincerity of the pre-Fall Adamic days. The civilization that began with a wrapping of the fig-leaf in Eden as it advanced, or "fell off" the edge of the inner paradise, became so shamefully costumed that in the whirling circles of these *lies of clothes*, the art of the cultivation of human flowers—more beautiful than the child of man, the flower, there in none—could no more be dealt with in the literatures of man in as innocent a spirit as, for example, the cultivation of beautiful roses in one's garden. All must veer round to those old times of deep and clear innocence and let all the knowledge of man know again that there is a deeper and more profound spirit of life in that ignorance. No shame of original sin attaches to talk on breeding plants and horses, but strange, that all mud sticks to the human flesh as regards this beautiful creation of himself !

Man is freer than all these animals and flowers to

imbibe, at will all the pleasures at the fountain-sources of life. His senses are his bondage as in other animals, but in their sensitiveness and spontaneous indulgence, he is nearer freedom. Animals are season-bound for pleasure, while man is free to create his own season of joy. Here Nature comes out in him to say that all progress is towards freedom. We are ascending toward freedom and Divinity. To celebrate the sensation of the Divine glory that comes through our senses is in the nature of reaction against the morbid asceticism of early Christian saints and the Brahmins of India. All realisation verily comes to us through our senses !

The spiritual enterprise with which Walt starts his *Leaves of Grass* is full of potential vitality. The time is not far when the 'children of Adam' who are already coming out to cast off the shams of shame and modesty for the sake of mere pleasure and fashionable freedom of doing what one likes with himself and herself—the shallow frivolous spirit that manifests itself in modern ways—, will learn and know better in the school of experience that such things should be cast off *not for pleasure, but for the noble duty of making man, of creating them anew.* And they would learn by a widespread and universal reaction of returning to the Heart of Mother Nature that at her feet again, the Spirit of Life, demands one's "love-spendings" in the making of "perfect men and women." Such is the argument of Walt Whitman.

Perfect men and women are born of the Spirit. Soul-consciousness interpenetrating soul-consciousness, noble divine love merging soul into soul, is not said of the mere bodies. The physical unions are

merely contingent. Either one must be born of the Spirit, or one has to be reborn, *twice-born* to belong to the Spirit. It is the latter in the case of Mary Magdalene; she was reborn of the Spirit. The Soul-Consciousness of Jesus Christ interpenetrates the Soul-Consciousness of her who was condemned, and it is the indescribable *inner union* of consciousness with consciousness, which in its full blossom is her freedom from the miserable bondage of the sin that bruised her beautiful hands and feet. In no sense is Walt Whitman understood by me as anything but spiritual, sometimes, a pre-fall Adamic person, and sometimes, an after-fall man of Resurrection. He is talking not only to the ancients and justifying them, but he is talking to the coming worlds of man from the stand-point of a wholly, absolutely freed, love-intoxicated, life-inebriated, beauty-drunk soul. While looking at a woman's form, he is imagining constellations of stars strung in her every pore ! In his hands are gathered the throbbing breathless Blossoms of Life, as it flowers in the stars above and in the human flesh below.

"The curious sympathy one feels when feeling with the hand the naked meat of the body,
The circling rivers the breath and breathing it in and out,
The beauty of the waist, and thence of the hips and thence down—towards the knees,
The thin red jellies within you or within me, the bones and the marrow in the bones,
The exquisite realisation of health;
O I say these are not the parts and poems of the

body only, but of the soul.
I say now these are the soul."

("I Sing the Body Electric")

I am at present living with the farmers of the Punjab; I pay occasional visits to their homes, meet them, men and women, sitting together and talking, men a bit audacious and imperious and ignorant, the women, a bit retiring and wholly modest, and straight forward, queen-like in their grace and delicacy, and almost omniscient in human qualities. I know by comparison how sad and tragic is the pale wan face of the city people of Lahore and Amritsar, who are by some strange necessity buried in their brick vaults and unlike their sisters living in these villages, can seldom own the sun and the moon and the stars as things lying in their barns for them to play with. How sick must be the soul of woman behind those *chicks* and shutters of false and foolish genteelness of the town society ! And I feel more vividly the words of Walt singing like this :

"Now I shall dismiss myself from impassive women,
I will go stay with her who waits for me, and with those women, that are warm-blooded and sufficient for me,
I see that they understand me and do not deny me,
I see that they are worthy of me, I will be the robust husband of those women.
They are not one jot less than I am,
They are tanned in the face by shining suns and blowing winds,

Their flesh has the old divine suppleness and strength,
They know how to swim, row, ride, wrestle, shoot, run, strike, retreat, advance, resist, defend themselves,
They are ultimate in their own right—they are calm, clear, well-possessed of themselves..."

("A Woman Waits for Me")

The manhood here is crystallised into perfect shapes in the poems of Walt. He does not wish that any woman on earth should be allowed to remain in some amorphous form, or be just a toy to play with and serve the lust of man. No one man or woman should be ashamed of his or her body that carries the glory both of earth and Heaven. Optimism is in its most fervent state when it can stand facing the sun and cast out the sublime pessimism of such philosophers as find delight in denying the perfection of human body, which is almost come on the verge of being the soul. And how deliriously mysterious are the shades under which the optimistic faith of this poet-creator reposes most actively :

"As Adam early in the morning,
Walking forth from the bower, refresh'd with sleep,
Behold me where I pass, hear my voice, approach,
Touch me, touch the palm of your hand to my body as I pass,
But not afraid of my body"

An old *jangli* farmer here where I live sat amidst his sons and daughters-in-law in an open courtyard

in his mud-walled hut, built right in the midst of the waving wheat and mustard. A nest-like clean house, just across my fields. He sat basking in the warm winter sunshine of the Punjab. He was innocent and spiritual in the sense he had infinite leisure all about him, within him, and unlike me, was not tired of it, nor impatient with his life. He chatted leisurely, chewing his words under his teeth, and got some joy for himself and some splashes of humour for his listeners. He loved to tickle them. He said to me, "Look my daughters-in-law are so beautiful. You see, I go and get daughters-in-law, the wives for my sons, just as I go and buy good-looking cows. They all know me, I have a horse sense for such things". And he whispered into my ears," Mind you, I see that they are strong and beautiful. We have to create images of Allah out of them." And this old giant, *mehdi*-dyed, red-bearded *jangli* farmer was in his primitive, but genuine human instinct, a kin of Walt's.

And I read the following from *Leaves of Grass*, descriptive of a civilised, spiritual farmer of the future to whose personality we all must make approaches to be *men*, with our direction orientated rightly towards the highest in us.

"I knew a man, a common farmer, the father of five sons,
And in them the fathers of sons, and in them the fathers of sons,
This man was of wonderful vigour, calmness, beauty of person,
The shape of his head, the pale yellow and white

of his hair and beard, the immeasurable meaning of his black eyes, the richness and breadth of his manners,
These I used to go and visit him to see, he was wise also,
He was six feet tall, he was over eighty years old, his sons were massive, clean, bearded, tan-faced, handsome,
They and his daughters loved him, all who saw him loved him,
They did not love him by allowance, they loved him with personal love,
He drank water only, the blood show'd like scarlet through the clear-brown skin of his face,
He was a frequent gunner and fisher, he sail'd his boat himself; he had a fine one presented to him by a ship-joiner; he had fowling-pieces presented to him by men that loved him,
When he went with his five sons and many grandsons to hunt or fish, you would pick him out as the most beautiful and the vigorous of the gang,
You would wish long and long to be with him, you would wish to sit by him in the boat that you and he might touch each other."

("I Sing the Body Electric")

With that tender, sympathetic, and omnisciently critical touches, Whitman gives us in this poem, especially in the last two lines, a complete picture of the *inner man*. It is the *inner man* that is laid bare and

its supreme quality of soul that aches and draws human love so irresistibly. "His daughters loved him, all who saw him loved him :

"You would wish long and long to be with him,
You would wish to sit by him in the boat that
you and he might touch each other."

A similar fascination is cast upon us when we happen to come across a truly spiritual person. The latter's presence soothes and inspires implicit trust. We, the Sikhs in the Punjab, call such a man *sadh*, and frequently, he is a humble labourer of the soil. Our Master tilled land, weeded his wheat crops, and he and his disciples together went and sang and harvested them. So this picture drawn by Walt lures us to some great distance away, up there, beyond him; possibly, this is some dim, faint resemblance to a disciple of those Great Farmers and Makers of men—the Gurus who came and liberated us. This, to us, is the sketch of a disciple peasant. For, we also meet our *sadh* and come and say to each other with great delight : "I have touched him". We pour our soul at His Feet.

After all, the Gurus proclaimed that spirituality is a question of continuous attitude towards the Mysterious Person that dwells in the cosmos. It is a force that draws a woman to man, a plant to light, and the existence of this attitude is independent of the outer conditions of life. And their ethics is to maintain this attitude of "wonder, reverence, acceptance and love" by a noble, silent and watchful activity of the soul. They say one's first concern is to keep the "light" burning in the temple of one's heart. It burns

not necessarily by renouncing home and wife and child and property; it burns not necessarily by accumulating riches and wealth and name and fame. Allelse is only a change in our conditions of life, while living in health of soul and body is the essential functioning of life itself. It is like the shining of the sun, something inmost in man. So the Guru renounces the monistic vagaries of the old Brahmanical thought, and celebrates the Divine Realisation at once in ploughing, in riding, in home life and in the desert. The Guru created sweet homes in the Punjab, and in the *Khalsa* a freed Commune of *Comrades*. They were called "Brothers." Individuals stood as representative symbols of the Khalsa Commune. Their prayers were not individualistic, but Communistic. "Save O Lord, the *Khalsa* (the plural Commune) wherever the Khalsa be. Even one individual Sikh was called "the Khalsa" On the banks of the Five Rivers, in the Punjab, the Gurus actually planted comrades thick as forests, and made the poetic ambition of Walt an ocularly visible fact more than four hundred years ago. A great poetic experiment of socialising the great truth of soul was performed with success by the Gurus, and Walt is calling the Khalsa out of the prairies and workshops and cities of America.

III

COSMIC DIVINE PERSONALITY

WALT WHITMAN AND OTHER POEMS

We are taught to lose our little selves. The small, miserable "I" bounded by shoes and a hat (or a turban, as in our case), is only an illusory miniature virtual image of the Great Cosmic Personality Divine, whose presence is suggested by a diffused Beauty that takes shapes and forms and still transcends them. A Shining Figure of Light appearing in the skies shows us that the sky with all its stars is the magic of her eyes. As in the sea, the sun dips into her heart and is gone. When she appears, all else seems as an illusion. When the Figure is not in sight, everything suggests her presence. If the stars seem to have stolen the lustre of her cosmic glance, the little flower on earth has her faint smile. If the sun spreads the gold cloth for her to tread on everyday, its fierce burning heart has the infinite passion of her soul. There is her moment of emotion in the colour of life, and its mood of reproduction. And the open path has the mystic significance of her beckoning Silver Finger as if on the remote and yonder, she is calling. And Walt Whitman must have seen this Beautiful Person of the cosmos, for in his chants, there is a vivid intimation of this secret companionship.

This melting away of the individuality into the great glory of Cosmic consciousness and from there appearing again as a man with a staff coming out of the very sun, and saying "I," lends to the little "I" the immaculate purity of the Cosmic Personality divine. This "I" has no little "I" in it. Our religions and creeds in the East are mere scrap iron if they do not guide us how to be very gods.

Where metaphysics of the old Brahman impedes us, the Great inspiration of Love as in *Buddhism*, *Christism* and *Nanak-Gobind Singhism* opens before us great vistas of perfection. And not in the metaphysical static sense of the old Brahman books, but in the lyrical spirit of these three great systems of Revelation of Perfection, we find that *Luminous Figure of Love*, the Divine Cosmic Person, hovering over the suns and stars. He comes and enters into Man, the novitiate, and fills him with Grace. As the sword enters the scabbard, so this soul of the Universe, in a symbolic Form of Light, enters the human casement. The Person of man so full of that Holy Grace, like a seed, bursts forth into a million 'himselves.' It is the Cosmic Consciousness that dawns in that uniquely inspired state, which kisses the rose with the same ardour with which a lover kisses the rose-lips of his beloved, and feels the mountains to be its bones, and the rivers to be its arteries. The solidity of the universe vanishes, and the dream invests the whole universe with a noble plasticity. The universe thence forward swings as an inner Reality in the soul of men There it is *all-man* enlarged, and here it is all the universe reduced into a finite divine Figure of Man. Deep is the significance of this Divine Incarnation.

And in this Cosmic phenomenon of the inspiration of Man through the Divine Personality is revealed the Holy Spirit of the Universe.

We, in the East, are deeply enamoured of this inward Truth, and it is with specific relish that we read poems of Walt such as these :

"The loving day, the mounting sun, the friend I am happy with,
The arm of my friend hanging idly over my shoulder,
The hillside whiten'd with blossoms of the mountain ash,
The same late in autumn, the hues of red, yellow, drab, purple, and light and dark green,
The rich coverlet of the grass, animals and birds, the private untrimmed bank, the primitive apples, the pebble stones,
Beautiful dripping fragments, the negligent list of one after an other, as I happen to call them to me or think of them.
The real poems (what we call poems being merely pictures)
The poems of the privacy of the night, and of men like me,
This poem drooping shy and unseen that I always carry and that all men carry.
(Know once for all, avow'd on purpose, wherever all men like me, are our lusty, lurking masculine poem),
Love-thoughts, love-juice, love-odour, love-yielding, love-climbers and the climbing sap,
Arms and hands of love, lips of love, phallic thumb of love, breasts of love, bellies press'd and glued together with love,
Earth of chaste love, life that is only life after love,
The body of my love, the body of the woman I love, the body of the man, the body of the earth,
Soft forenoon airs that blow from the south-west,
The hairy wild-bee that murmurs and hankers up and down, that gripes the full-grown lady-flower, curves upon her with amorous firm legs, takes his will or her, and holds himself tremulous and tight till he is satisfied;
The wet of woods through the early hours,
The sleepers at night lying close together as they sleep, one with an arm slanting down across and below the waist of the other,
The smell of apples, aromas from crush'd sage-plant, mint, brick bark,
The boy's longings, the glow and pressure as he confides to me what he was dreaming,
The dead leaf whirling its spiral whirl and falling still and content to the ground,
The no-form'd stings that sights, people, objects, sting me with,
The hubb'd sting of myself, stinging me as much as it ever can any one,
The sensitive, orbic underlapp'd brothers, that only privileged feelers may be intimate where they are,
The curious roamer the hand roaming all over

the body, the bashful withdrawing of flesh where the fingers soothingly pause and edge themselves,
The limpid liquid within the young man,
The vex'd corrosion so pensive and so painful,
The torment, the irritable tide that will not be at rest,
The like of the same I feel, the like of the same in others,
The young man that flushes and flushes and the young woman that flushes and flushes,
The young man that wakes deep at night, the hot hand seeking to repress what would master him,
The mystic amorous night, the strange-half-welcome pangs, visions sweats,
The pulse pounding through palms and trembling, encircling fingers, the young man all colour'd red, ashamed, angry;
The souse upon me of my lover the sea, as I lie willing and naked,
The merriment of the twin babes that crawl over the grass in the sun, the mother never turning her vigilant eyes from them,
The walnut-trunk, the walnut-husks, and the ripening or ripen'd long-round walnuts,
The continence of vegetables, birds, animals,
The consequent meanness of me should sulk or find myself indecent, while birds and animals never once sulk or find themselves indecent,
The great chastity of paternity, to match the great chastity of maternity,

The oath of procreation I have sworn my Adamic and fresh daughters,
The greed that eats me day and nights with hungry gnaw, till I saturate what shall produce boys to fill my place when I am through,
The wholesome relief, repose, content,
And the bunch, pluck'd at random from myself,
It has done its work—I toss it carelessly to fall where it may."

("Children of Adam" "Spontaneous Me")

"To the garden, the world, anew ascending,
Potent mates, daughters, sons, preluding,
The love, the life of their bodies, meaning and being,
Curious, here behold my resurrectton after slumber,
The revolving cycles in their wide sweep having brought me again,
Amorous, mature, all beautiful to me, all wondrous,
My limbs and the quivering fire that ever plays through them, for reasons, most wondrous,
Existing I peer and penetrate still, content with the present, content with the past,
"Children of Adam" To the Garden the World"
By my side, or back of me, Eve following,
Or in front, and I following her just the same
O to drink the mystic deliria deeper than any other man
To savage and tender achings,
I bequeathe them to you my children,
I tell them to you, for reasons, O bridegroom

and bride ..

"O something unprov'd ! something in a trance
To escape utterly from other's anchors and holds!
To drive free ! to love free ! to dash reckless and
dangerous !
To court destruction with taunts, with invita-
tions !
To ascent, to leap to the heavens of the love
indicated to me !
To rise thither with my inebriate soul !
To be lost if it must be so
To feed the remainder of life with one hour o
fulness and freedom !
With one brief hour of madness and joy."

("Children of Adam," "One
Hour to Madness and Joy"

The diffusion of the infinite passion of such a seer cures the human malady of getting self-petrified both through the habits of vice and virtue. Walt breathes the messianic spirit of raising the spiritually dead—(and, as Julia says in her letter to William Stead, more of us die in churches than in the brothels)—to the fresher, nobler and brighter outlook of the living and the vital. Putrid become the relations of man and woman all over the world in these days because they see each other's conventional limitations and do not have the mystic deliria of life and love to peer beyond into the infinite mystery of creation which breathes eternally through flower, stone and stars, though ox and man and angel. All is beautiful to the enlightened eye that catches the glimpse of the Divine Personality and sees something indescribably

ravishing where the blind of soul see but the commonplace. And how refreshing is the vista out of the window that the poet flings open :

"We two, how long we were fool'd,
Now transmuted, we swiftly escape, as Nature
escapes,
We are Nature, long have we been absent, but
now we return,
We become plants, foliage, roots, bark,
We are bedded in the ground, we are rocks,
We are oaks, we grow in the openings side by
side,
We browse, we are two among the wild herds
spontaneous as any,
We are two fishes swimming in the sea together,
We are what locust blossoms are, we drop scent
around lanes mornings and evenings,
We are also the coarse smut of beasts, vegetables,
minerals,
We are two predatory hawks, we soar above and
look down,
We are two resplendent suns, we it is who
balance ourselves orbic and stellar, we are
as two comets,
We prowl fang'd and four-footed in the woods,
we spring on prey,
We are two clouds, forenoons and afternoons
driving overhead,
We are seas mingling, we are two of those
cheerful waves rolling over each other and
interwetting each other,
We are what the atmosphere is, transparent,

receptive, pervious, impervious,
We are snow, rain, cold, darkness, we are each product and influence of the globe,
We have circled and circled till we have arrived home again, we two
We have voided all but freedom and all but our own joy, ...
("Children of Adam", "We Two How Long we Were Fool'd")

We in the East come, though seldom and very rarely, in contact with strange men of Cosmic Consciousness who are attuned to different and higher purposes as opposed to the ordinary men. We find them running away from the stereotyped, from the petrified men and women of society. They feel suffocated in their company, for their souls are empty and their speech husky under the strain to express a mind of dead conventional religiosity, or cants of social and political hypocrisy. Their ignorant, flippant courtesies, and their foolish vanities of jewels and rich silks, and their set hobbies of positions and ranks and riches and respectability are but manifestations of an obese, sick self which is cut off from the sources of life. They are to them more like stagnant pools of water full of mud and scum and sin. They prefer the company of hill streams, or of rose bushes, or even of cattle grazing in the sunshine. And yet their living sympathy attracts to their presence the common miserable prostitutes who would fain come to drink the cup of humanity with them. And the saints pour on them the sympathy of a mother, a father and a brother. With the blessings of these large men, the miserable

sinners feel reconciled to life inspite of its squalor and sin. In their new devotion, some of these miserable women rise above their bodily life and become saints. In their eyes shines the seraphic blackness of Heavenly Perfection. And it is possibly in this vein of the Eastern mystics that Walt breaks the conventions, and goes to drink with the most vicious and the most wretched. Bhai Vir Singh, that beautiful person, said to me the other day, "They ask me why I go and be the guest of the apparently vicious people. And I say, the virtuous are as gardens watered by the waters of paradise. I am but a little stream, I go singing and losing myself in the dry dust of these vice-parched lands; perchance a stray lily may bloom in the neglected deserts."

Native moments—when you come upon me—ah you are here now,
Give me now libidinous joys only,
Give me the drench of my passions, give me life coarse and rank,
To-day I go consort with Nature's darlings, to-night too
I am for those who believe in loose delights, I shake the midnight orgies of young men,
I dance with the dancers and drink with the drinkers,
The echoes ring with our indecent calls, I pick out some low person for my dearest friend,
He shall be lawless, rude, illiterate, he shall be condemn'd by others for deeds done,
I will play a part no longer, why should I exile myself from my companions ?

O you shunned persons, I at least do not shun you,
I come forthwith in your midst, I will be your poet,
I will be more to you than to any of the rest.
("Children of Adam," "Native Moments")

This is the recognition of the inner man and woman. Actions are also clothes. Thoughts too are veils that conceal the inner man. Whitman gets behind the folds of darkness that enwrap man under all outer conditions of life, and imprints his kiss direct on the soul of man which to the uninitiated is always inaccessible.

Friendship is very rare. Some befriend our shape beautiful; they are fond of our charming curves and colour. Some befriend our resourcefulness and other qualities, and some befriend our goodness, a kind of courteous sweetness that smiles on all; but where is that friendship that loves us ? The Sikh poet of the Punjab, Bhai Vir Singh, spoke to me with tears in his eyes : "True friendships one can find either in sub-human species like dogs, or in super-human species, for they of those regions have transcended the consciousness of our faults and sins," How Walt touches these chords of rare friendships in his carol of occupations !

"If you stand at work in a shop, I stand as nigh as the nighest in the same shop,
If you bestow gifts on your brother or dearest friend I demand as good as your brothers or dearest friend,
If your lover, husband, wife, is welcome by day

or night, I must be personally as welcome,
If you become degraded, criminal, ill, then I become so for your sake,
If you remember your foolish and outlaw'd deeds, do you think I cannot remember my own foolish and outlaw'd deeds ?
If you carouse at the table I carouse at the opposite side of the table,
If you meet some stranger in the streets and love him or her, why I often meet strangers in the street and love them.
Why what have you thought of yourself ?
Is it you then that thought yourself less ?
Is it you that thought the President greater than you ?
Or the rich better off than you ? or the educated wiser than you ?
(Because you are greasy or pimpled, or were once drunk, or a thief,
Or that you are diseas'd, or rheumatic or a prostitute,
Or from frivolity or impotence, or that you are no scholar and never saw your name in print,
Do you give in that you are any less immortal ?)
Souls of men and women ! it is not you I call unseen, unheard, untouchable and untouching,
It is not you I go argue pro and con about, and to settle whether you are alive or no,
I own publicly who you are if nobody else owns.
(Calamus, "A Song for Occupations")

TO A COMMON PROSTITUTE

"Be composed—be at ease with me—I am Walt Whitman, liberal and lusty as Nature,
Not till the sun excludes you do I exclude you,
Not till the waters refuse to glisten for you and the leaves to rustle for you, do my words refuse to glisten and rustle for you,
"My girl I appoint with you an appointment, and I charge you that you make preparation to be worthy to meet me,
And I charge you that you be patient and perfect till I come.
Till then I salute you with a significant look that you do not forget me."

("Autumn Rivulets")

YOU FELONS ON TRIAL IN COURTS

You felons on trials in courts,
You convicts in prison—cells, you sentenced assassins, chain'd and handcuff'd with iron,
Who am I too that I am not on trial or in prison ?
Me ruthless and devilish as any, that my wrists are not chain'd with iron, or my ankles with iron ?
You prostitutes flaming over the trottoirs or obscene in your rooms,
Who am I that I should call you more obscene than myself ?
O culpable ! I acknowledge—I expose !
(O admirers, praise not me compliment not me—

you make me wince,
I see what you do not—I know what you do not)
Inside these breast—bones I lie smutch'd and choked,
Beneath this face that appears so impassive hell's tide continually run,
Lusts and wickedness are acceptable to me,
I walk with delinquents with passionate love,
I feel I am of them—I belong to these convicts and prostitutes myself
And hencefoth I will not deny them—how can I deny myself ?

Those who have realised that Figure of Perfection in this Great Illusion of the Universe, the Figure which invests creation with some vague Reality, that Cosmic Person Divine, do truly know. None else, none else knows. It is the Perfected concord of the Individual with the Universal beat of life, almost become a man with man, that is the true indwelling Guide of man. When music of that freedom fails, all fails. What He does is, to such enlightened ones, the right thing. The Ideal of Perfected Man finds a voice in Whitman when he says, "Whatever tastes sweet to the most perfect man, that is finally right."

Walt Whitman must have been sitting there when at Nander, Guru Gobind Singh spoke to us :

"Grieve not. *Guru Granitha*,—The Song of Songs I annoint as my successor. I will always meet you in its pages."

Walt echoes this great spiritual mystery when he says :

"My songs cease, I abandon them,

From behind the screen where I hid I advance
personally solely to you.
Camerado, this is no book,
Who touches this touches a man,
(Is it night ? are we here together alone ?)
It is I you hold and who holds you,
I spring from the pages into your arms—decease
calls me forth,
O how your fingers drowse me,
Your breath falls around me like dew, your pulse
lulls the tympans of my ears,
I feel immersed from head to foot,
Delicious, enough.
... ...
Dear friend, whoever you are take this kiss.
I give it especially to you, do not forget me,
I feel like one who has done work for the day
to retire awhile,
I receive now again of my many translations,
from my avataras ascending, while others
doubtless await me,
An unknown sphere more real than I dream'd,
more direct, darts awakening rays about me,
So long !
Remember my words, I may again return,
I love you, I depart from materials
I am as one disembodied, triumphant, dead"
("Songs of Parting," "So Long !")

If you wade through the lyrics of man all over the world, they, like Nature's primitive and crude efforts at creating beauty, centre round the theme of sex. All stories passing through many a dramatic

maze, emerge finally as simple stories of the old Adam and Eve. All songs of passion tremble on the open lips of a woman desiring man. The truly great amongst us are those who lift us above this dull sickening bond that has fettered us for centuries with its illusive fascinations. To us the Disciples, all lyrical poetry becomes a passion for the Most Beautiful Cosmic Person, the Bridegroom. All human substance must be burnt as oil for the night lamp, which burns, and the Bride waits for the whole night for the Bridegroom. Our Masters diffuse this great passion into the being of Nature, as rain diffuses itself in the soil. Nature, the visible God, has fascinated our Guru Nanak. Touching water of a running stream is touching Him The velvet of the grass and the emerald swards of the Himalayas are His sylvan retreats The Guru says, *Ban tan Parbat Haj Parbraham* "Touching the flesh of forests, mountains and man, I touch His Flesh".....

It is not the grass sprouting,
Nor the tree that coppices,
His Life is in its superfluous flow
And wondrous glow.

Guru Nanak offered the meadows full of flowers and the fragrance rising from the sandal woods of the Malayalam woods to Him. The stars he took in his hands and beaded them into a garland of pearls and put round His Neck. The winds in the Guru's eyes are fair damsels that fan Him. (We, in India have to conquer the heat of the tropics even in our divine lyrics).

Guru Nanak is seen by us always sitting under a tree. He is listening to the ravishing music of Nature.

We do not hear. He heard the mid-air Dancers Celestial; their light steppings made a riot of song, touching the azure sky-spread. Winds and water and fires, sing Him," says Guru Nanak in his *Japji.* This universe is the Palace, and the Guru asks, "Which way is the Door to Thee ?" He calls his Beloved Beautiful, "One who indwells in Nature." He calls Nature *Creation*. Thy Creation is Truth. The colours of our frail and false dreams and the evanescent moods are not in which Guru Nanak clothes Nature, as perhaps do the ordinary poets and dreamers of the world. On the other hand, he realises the beautiful Person of Nature and fascinated by Him, he colours with that glory his own thought and emotion. "Ah, He, holds," sings the Guru in his Realised Vision of Him, "the Inscrutable Pen, and He writes the destined ends on the foreheads of rivers and rocks, and on men and all ! He indwells in all things in a wondrous beauty-web. He enmeshes everything, and everything is woven in Him. Wonder is He, the Beautiful. I cannot praise Him enough. Seeing Him, I am bewitched. That Delectable Sight is my beautitude; I am dead in joy, a sacrifice at the Altar of that utter and absolute charm of His Presence."

Imbued with the spirit of the great Cosmic Love embodied by the Gurus, we delight in the very titles like "Proud Music of the Storm" "The Song of the Broad Axe," The Song of the Open Road". And in our eyes the Figure of the Guru's disciple rises to its large divine stature of the one who has transcended the limits of human consciousness, when we find Whitman jumping out of the earth, as it were, and

addressing this spinning globe this :

SAY OLD TOP-KNOT WHAT DO YOU WANT

"Earth,you seem to look for something at my hands
Say, old top-knot, what do you want ?" How vast he grows in his songs like these !

"I hear the annual singing of the children in St. Paul's cathedral,
Or, under the high roof of some colossal hall, the symphonies oratorios of Beethoven, Handel or, Haydn
The Creation in billows of godhood laves me.
Give me to hold all sounds (I madly struggling cry,)
Fill me with all the voices of the universe,
Endow me with their throbbings, Nature's also,
The tempests, waters, winds, operas and chants, marches and dances,
Utter, pour in, for I would take them all !
("Song of Myself", "Proud Music of the Storm")

And we sing every morning just when the day comes and gilds with the Heaven's liquid gold the strings of our *Sitars*, the Guru's Hymn of *Asa De Var*, the Hymn which begins with *Vismad*, "The Song of Amazement "

O wonder is the voices
O wonder is the mystery of this riddle,
O wonder is Forms of Beauty
O wonder is the colour of Beauty,
O wonder is Nudity of souls,
O wonder is the wind blowing,
O wonder is the water flowing,

O wonder is the fire burning,
O wonder is the earth,
O wonder is the teeming life,
O wonder is the relish of eating and drinking and smelling
O wonder is we meet all this
O wonder is we separate from all this
O wonder is the hunger
O wonder is the satiation of all hungers,
O wonder is the song of His Praise,
O wonder is the Hymn of His Glory,
O wonder is this Near,
O wonder is That Remote,
O wonder is the trackless wilderness alone there is no path out,
O wonder is the path that leads !

Nurtured on hymns such as these, it is nothing strange if, of all the rest of the world, we Sikhs feel nearer the spirit of this American poet who sings :

"Illustrious every one !
Illustrious what we name space, sphere of unnumber'd spirits,
Illustrious the mystery of motion in all beings, even the tiniest insect,
Illustrious the attribute of speech, the senses, the body,
Illustrious the passing light—illustrious the pale reflection on the new moon in the western sky,
Illustrious whatever I see or hear or touch, to the last.
Good in all,
In the satisfaction and aplomb of animals,

In the annual return of the seasons,
In the hilarity of youth,
In the strength and flush of manhood,
In the grandeur and exquisiteness of old age,
In the superb vistas of death.

Wonderful to depart !
Wonderful to be here !
The heart, to jet the all-alike and innocent blood !
To breathe the air, how delicious !
To speak—to walk—to seize something by the hand !
To prepare for sleep, for bed, to look on my rose-color'd flesh !
To be conscious of my body, so satisfied. so large ;
To be this incredible God I am !
To have gone forth among other Gods, these men and women I love.
Wonderful how I celebrate you and myself !
How my thoughts play subtly at the spectacles around !
How the clouds pass silently overhead !
How the earth darts on and on ! and how the sun, moon, stars, dart on and on !
How the water sports and sings ! (surely it is alive !)
How the trees rise and stand up, with strong trunks, with branches and leaves !
(Surely there is something more in each of the trees, some living soul,)
O amazement of things—even the least particle !
O spirituality of things !
O strain musical flowing through ages and con-

tinents, now reaching me and America !
I take your strong chords intersperse them, and
cheerfully pass them forward.
I too carol the sun, usher'd or at noon, or as now,
setting,
I too throb to the brain and beauty of the earth
and of all the growths of the earth,
I too have felt the resistless call of myself.

("Songs of Parting", "Song at Sunset")

IV

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SELF

Nature has made individuals immortals. and the immortals make societies, congregations. nations, humanities here on this earth, and Plural Divinities in those Unseen Realms to which Walt Whitman also makes significant references. "As unknown sphere more real than I dreamed, more direct, darts awakening rays about me, *so long*."

There is a crude philosophy of Self that is found in the old Sanskrit *Upnishdas*. When the individual is thrown upon himself through despair and disappointments, then this old philosophy of Self, as propounded in those verses of the old, soothes us in our bereavements of the soul. It makes our death as individuals, calm. It is, however, death soothing death. In this bit of conceptual thinking, no one else is held real as an entity, but the individual who relates himfelf to them, The verses say, it is the self that makes things dear to us. The wife is not dear because of her, but of the self. The husband invests in her. The son is not dear because he is my son, but "I" that invest in him. And so on.

The Brahmanical philosophy, disgusted, rightly or wrongly, with the ennui of flesh finds it an extremely peace-resting theory of life. Indeed, its lure is intense for those who are ignorant of the life of union with

Cosmic Personality. Schopenhauer too finds in his critical mind this lure soothing enough. He calls it the solace of his life. Whenever I too find the world of man around full of selfishness, dirt and dust and deception, I too feel, many a time, tempted to lean on it. But those moments are mements of the drift of soul consciousness from the music of the Cosmic Person; they are dark moments of life when an individual thus loves to cease to be that whole society. The Gurus do not find such a philpsophy of self in tune with life, as they create that Divine Union in the thoroughfares of struggle and sorrow. The tree grows and the water flows without minding what response there is their to little life from the Universe around. And if we grow in the same rhythm of harmonious Beauty, it is idle to get disappointed if the sun does not run to light our cigars. All the old Brahmanical renunciation and asceticism based on this philosophy of self is the petty turning away from the Beautiful One. It is based on the sorrow of separation.

These great Sanskrit pundits arrogantly go forward to interpret the words of Christ. It is written, "Love thy neighbour as thyself." It is plain. By loving my neighbour alone I know if I have in me the sweetness of the Cosmic Person, of that Figure of Light. If he is in me, I shall be all love, all sweetness, all honey. My speech will be noble, my service full of soul, and my actions all divine. Thus, I cannot but love my neighbour as myself. When I am inspired by That Grace, I am driven to love my neighbour as myself. I cannot do otherwise. In fact and in reality "myself" in that superb and exquisite realisation of

higher life, when the Holy Ghost comes and dwells in me, is gone, and when it is lost, *I love*. I simply love. Love comes from Him to me. And Love or the soul Beautiful coming into me transcends all miserable selves. As the light is from the sun, so love radiates to all from Him. No one can love but He, the Cosmic Person. And the truest "self" is "Love" *which knows no self*. But these great philosophers of Self say "Why love our neighbour". and they reply : "because he is our self." As if we know our self ! This theoretical knowledge of the motive at the back of our loving soils love itself. They substitute logic for life itself. Too much explaining is killing. Truth in words and symbols, it's a dull inanity of mere concepts. Feeling of love is not generated in us by our so-called "self", but by the *beautiful spirit of things*. And it is the response of the universe which makes life worth living.

Our Gurus wiped out this too much knowing about natural functions. They took us into the open, under the trees, under the stars, and said to us almost in the famous words of Goethe :

Who can name Him
Who thus proclaims him
I believe Him
Who that hath feeling
His bosom steeling
Can say : I believe Him not
The All-embracing,
The All-sustaining,
Clasps and sustains He, not
Thee, Me, Himself ?

Springs not the vault of Heaven above us ?
Lieth not Earth firm, stretched 'neath our feet
And with a cheerful twinkling,
Climb not eternal stars the sky
Eye into eye gaze, I not upon thee
Singeth not all
To head and heart within thee
And floats in endless mystery,
Invisible, visible around thee
Great thou it be, fill thou therefrom thy heart,
And when in the feeling wholly blest thou art,
Call it then what thou will,
Call it Bliss, Heart, Love, God
I have no name for it."

It is the soul of man filled with this gladness that the Guru invokes. The Guru sings of this soul, not of the self. We the Sikhs sing in our hymns the Cosmic Personality, not the "self of man" that resides, as the old crude *Upanishadas* say, "like a thumb-like light in *man's heart*" We have come of age, and we dance hand in hand with the Beautiful, forgetting all. We, the Sikhs, though acknowledging for the sake of politeness the old philosophy of "self" as something clever, refuse to stand upon it. We dare not say aloud, but possibly, the Ultimate may after all be and *alive*. There is no light possibly in the central core of the sun. There is perhaps no flower in the roots of a jasmine tree. There is that dead balance of positive and negative electrons in the heart of things that for all practical purposes, the inmost region may be of dark death. Possibly, the electric disturbance on the surface is all the life in this wondrous universe. We,

therefore, believe that Walt Whitman's utterances, like those of ours, do not spring from any theoretical considerations, or from any philosophical system. They come, like flowing river, from the ecstasy of his being

The poems of Walt Whitman dealing with the self are familiar carols to us. Nazir Akbarabadi has a long poem, in which he says :

If you wish to see the soul, see your own countenance,
Hold the glass in your hand and mark how beautiful is thy brow that arches,
How mysterious thy eyes !

An exact parallel is to be found in Whitman's verse :-

Was somebody asking to see the soul ?
See, your own shape and countenance, persons, substances, beasts, the trees, the running rivers. the rocks and sands.
("Starting from Paumanok")

Walt Whitman cases to be a mere man, and it is refreshing to find in his poems the spirit of things in myriad forms, still transcending them.

O trumpeter, methinks I am myself the instrument thou playest,
Thou melt'st my heart, my brain—thou movest, drawest, changest them at will;
And now thy sullen notes send darkness through me,
Thou takest away all cheering light, all hope,
.....("The Mystic Trumpter")
Now trumpeter, for thy close

Vouchsafe a higher strain than any yet,
Sing to my soul, renew its languishing faith and hope.
Rouse up my slow belief, give me some vision of the future,
Give me for once its prophecy and joy.
He is so intertwined with the soul of the Universe, that in his highest and intensest moments, he is all Nature.
"The efflux of the soul is happiness, here is happiness,
I think it pervades the open air, waiting at all times,
Now it flows unto us, we are rightly-charged."
("Song of the open Road")

He is delirious with joy when he says,
objects, grass and the Unseen soul are one.
A man, yet by these tears a little boy again,
Throwing myself on the sand, confronting the waves,
I, chanter of pains and joys, uniter of here and hereafter,
Taking all hints to use them, but swiftly leaping beyond them,
A reminiscence sing"
("Sea-Drift", "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking")

I need no assurances, I am a man who is pre-occupied of his own soul;
I do not doubt that from under the feet and

beside the hands and face I am cognizant of, are now looking faces I am not cognizant of, calm and actual faces,
I do not doubt but the majesty and beauty of the world are latent in any iota of the world,
("Whispers of Heavenly Death", "Assurances")

These are really the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands, they are not original with me,
If they are not yours as much as mine, they are nothing or next to nothing,
This is the grass that grows wherever the land is and the water is,
This is the common air that bathes the globe.
("Song of Myself")

I am not the poet of goodness only, I do not decline to be the poet of wickedness also.
Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or amtouched from.
Is this then a touch ? quivering me to a new identity,
Flames and ether making a rush for my veins,
I know I am solid and sound,
To me the converging objects of the universe perpetually flow,
All are written to me, and I must get what the writing means.
I know I am deathless,
I know this orbit of mine cannot be swept by a carpenter's compass,
I know I shall not pass like a child's carlacue cut

with a burnt stick at night.
I know I am august,
I do not trouble my spirit to vindicate itself or be understood,
I see that the elementary laws never apologize,
(I reckon I behave no prouder than the level I plant my house by, after all.)
I exist as I am, that is enough,
If no other in the world be aware, I sit content,
And if each and all be aware, I sit content.

V

STARTING FROM PAUMANOK, INSCRIPTIONS AND OTHER POEMS

We Sikhs read that when Guru Nanak, a boy, was sent to school, he could not learn as they wished. He taught his teachers. On the very first day, he asked the school master : "Teach me this large word of the Universe. Teach me of this great wonder and life". The same spirit pervaded in the country afterwards, and our mystic, Bullahshah of Kasur, begins his poems thus :

"I need but one Aliph,
I need no other knowing."

For us, the Punjabi Sikhs, it comes as a refreshing echo of the mood of our greatness when we read :

"Beginning my studies, the first stage pleas'd me so much,
The mere fact consciousness, these forms, the power of motion,
The least insect or animal, the senses, eyesight, love,
The first step I say awed me and pleas'd me so much,
I have hardly gone and hardly wish'd to go any farther,
But stop and loiter all the time to sing it in ecstatic songs"

("Inscriptions", "Beginning My Studies")

It is this unequipment as a scholar, as a musician, or even as an artist as understood in the ordinary parlance that befits Whitman to sound these strange mad notes of joy and life and love :-

"When I read the book, the biography famous,
And is this, then (said I) what the author calls a man's life ?
And so will some one when I am dead and gone write my life ?
(As if any man really knew aught of my life
Why even I myself I often think know little or nothing of my real life,
Only a few hints, a few diffused faint clews and indirections.
I seek for my own use to trace out here".)
("Inscriptions", "When I Read the Book")

"I will make the poems of materials, for I think they are to be the most spiritual poems,
And I will make the poems of my body and of mortality,
For I think I shall then supply myself with the poems of my soul and of immortality."
("Starting from Paumanok")

Parallel passages can be quoted easily from our Sikh scriptures in which the Universe is called an inscription. "These objects are the words by which we read life", as in the *Japji* of Guru Nanak.

And Walt translates this idea thus : "Air, soil, water, fire,—these are words".

We believe, unlike the old Aryans, as I have said elsewhere, that the individual as a finite centre of the

infinite finds its fulfilment in its bursting out into the blossomed expanse of society, the Commune. And it is in this destined end of human personality growing to be Divine Personality, that we Sikhs discover a sweet harmony in the self-contradictions of Whitman :-

One's-Self I sing, a simple separate person,
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-masse.

I will sing the song of companionship,
I will show what alone must finally compact these,
I believe these are to found their own ideal of manly love, indicating it in me,
I will therefore let flame from me the burning fires that were threatening to consume me,
I will lift what has too long kept down those smouldering fires,
I will give them complete abandonment,
I will write the evangel-poem of comrades and of love,
For who but I should understand love with all its sorrow and joy,
And who but I should be the poet of comrades ?
I am the credulous man of qualities, ages, races,
I advance from the people in their own spirit,
Here is what sings unrestricted faith.
Omnes ! *omnes* ! let others ignore what they may,
I make the poem of evil also, I commemorate that part also,
I am myself just as much evil as good, and my nation is—and I say there is in fact no evil
(Or if there is I say it is just as important to you,

to the land or to me, as anything else.)
("Starting from Paumanok")

Our Gurus think those are dead who have gone out of the charmed tune of "Love of the Lord"—*religion.* "He is very beautiful, He comes of a noble race, Great is his mind and power He is a rich man. He is a philosopher. But he is dead, for he hath not the Love of the Lord" And again :-

"The low-caste privy cleaner is excellent and superior, in the temple of whose heart burns the Love of the Lord."

Not the religions that despoil the nations and individuals, but the religion which deals with the works of life is our concern. Such a religion imbibes the infinite, and feeds life and its blossoms. That profundity of being without which, man with all his pleasures and avocations is but a dead carcass, concerns one's religion. It redoubles our faith in our Guru's insistence on living deeply in religion, in pains and pangs of life, away from the shallowness of mere pleasure, drink, theatre and song, away from the rapid decay and death of the soul when we read such likes as these :-

"Each is not for its own sake,
I say the whole earth and all the stars in the sky are for religion's sake.
I say no man has ever yet been half devout enough,
None has ever yet adored or worship'd half enough,
None has begun to think how divine he himself is, and how certain the future is.

I say that the real and permanent grandeur of these States must be their religion,
Otherwise there is no real and permanent grandeur ;
(Nor character nor life worthy the name without religion,
Nor land nor man or woman without religion.)
What are you doing young man ?
Are you so earnest, so given up to literature, science, art, amours ?
These ostensible realities, politics, points ?
Your ambition or business whatever it may be ?
It is well—against such I say not a word, I am their poet also,
But behold ! such swiftly subside, burnt up for religion's sake,
For not all matter is fuel to heat, impalpable flame, the essential life of the earth,
Any more than such are to religion.
What do you seek so pensive and silent ?
What do you need camerado ?
Dear son do you think it is love ?
Listen, dear son—listen America, daughter or son,
It is a painful thing to love a man or woman to excess, and yet it satisfies, it is great,
But there is something else very great, it makes the whole coincide,
It, magnificent, beyond materials, with continuous hands sweeps and provides for all.
Know you, solely to drop in the earth the germs of a greater religion,
The following chants each for its kind I sing.

My comrade !
For you to share with me two greatnesses, and a third one rising inclusive and more resplendent,
The greatness of Love and Democracy, and the greatness of Religion."

("Starting from Paumanok"

Here is the climax of expression of the Guru's creed as we have known it so long, so dumbly, in the Punjab :-

"two greatnesses...The greatness of Love and Democracy and the Greatness of Religion."

In brief, on this trinity is founded deep the Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh So do we know our history. Only our Democracy is of the spirit that is realised in Religion, in Love of the Lord, not in votes and all that nonsense.

And, it is again putting things of the soul before the body as in the following verse :-

"My body is here, love, but my soul flies to thee".

A woman imprisoned by a tyrant could well address a message like this to her beloved. And while in bed with the tyrant under the revolting circumstances of certain oppressive conditions of life, she may be sleeping with her angel in spirit, and with the tyrant only in body. With the passionate intensity of Jaidev as in the *Gita Govind*, Walt utters the complaint in bondage of the body, cheering them that they are no one's "possessions" in that hidden realm of freedom.

"I am a free companion, I bivouac by invading

watch fires,
I turn the bridegroom out of bed and stay with the bride myself,
I tighten her all night to my thighs and lips".

("Song of Myself")

It did happen once to me, and it may not be indecorous here to relate my own experience. I was sleeping alone, when suddenly I felt I was being pressed by the embrace of my loveliest friend, my legs intertwined with her legs. And though I was half awake, I still tried to make sure if it was she. My hands touched the flesh over her bones. And I felt her in my bed lying with me. When I was quite sure she had come to me at the dead of night, I got up, and saw she was sleeping soundly in her own bed, utterly unaware of my strange experience.

Sympathy must be flowing like a river out of his very toes, or else what is this ?
Stranger, if you passing meet me and desire to speak to me, why should you not speak to me ?
And why should I not speak to you" ?

("To You")

People who sometimes require introductions to me really injure me. Why ask lotuses and roses and jasmines to bring any introduction letters to yourself ? Beauty has its passage everywhere.

We meet Walt Whitman in the following passages as a freed soul, winging out of his body into the shining ether and creating a feeling of respectful awe

for the mystery of the Great living :-

"I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.
I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.
You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fibre your blood.

("Song of Myself")

What an elusive perfection that is never reached tempts us to follow it in the following :-

Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you.
Are you the new person drawn toward me ?
To begin with take warning, I am surely far different from what you suppose;
Do you suppose you will find in me your ideal ?
Do you think it so easy to have me become your lover ?
Do you think the friendship of me would be unalloy'd satisfaction ?
Do you think I am trusty and faithful ?
Do you see no further than this facade, this smooth and tolerant manner of me ?
Do you suppose yourself advancing on real ground toward a real heroic man ?
Have you no thought, O dreamer that it may be all *maya*, illusion ?

Whoever you are holding me now, in hand, without one thing all will be useless, I give you fair warning before you attempt me further,
I am not what you supposed, but far different.
Who is he that would become my follower ?
Who would sign himself a candidate for my affections ?

("Calamus", "Are You The New Person Drawn toward Me ?")

The way is suspicious, the result uncertain, perhaps destructive,
You would have to give up all else, I alone would expect to be your sole and exclusive standard,
Your novitiate would even then be long and exhausting,
The whole past theory of your life and all conformity to the lives around you would have to be abandon'd,
Therefore release me now before troubling yourself any further, let go your hand from my shoulders,
Put me down and depart on your way.

("Calamus", "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now In Hand")

And we read in the *Guru Grantha* :-

"It you wish to love me, give up all else,
Hold your hand in the hollow of your hand,
And then come up to my street for love."

Here to put your lips upon mine I permit you

With the comrade's long-dwelling kiss or the new husband's kiss,
For I am the new husband, and I am the comrade.
Or if you will, thrusting me beneath your clothing,
Where I may feel the throbs of your heart or rest upon your hip,
Carry me when you go forth over land or sea ;
For thus merely touching you is enough, is best,
And thus touching you would I silently sleep and be carried eternally".
For it is not for what I have put into it that I have written this book,
Nor is it by reading it you will acquire it,
Nor do those know me best who admire me and vauntingly praise me,
Nor will the candidates for my love (unless at most a very few) prove victorious,
Nor will my poems do good only, they will do just as much evil, perhaps more,
For all is useless without that which you may guess at many times and not hit, that which I hinted at;
Therefore release me and depart on your way.

("Calamus", Whoever You Are Holding Me Now In Hand)

We read in the *Guru Grantha* :

"Those who have my gems, conceal them, wrap them away and keep silent,
For no one is here who could evaluate them,
On the river banks perhaps in a stray ferry borne thither,
There will come men who will rejoice to see those gems,
Open the knots of thy purse, O poor disciple,
And share that glowing life with the rare jewellers there on the river banks."

O you whom I often and silently come where you are that I may be with you,
As I walk by your side or sit near, or remain in the same room with you,
Little you know the subtle electric fire that for your sake is playing within me."

("Calamus", "O You Whom I Often And Silently Come")

Says the Tenth Guru Gobind Singh :-

"He is mine. In the Shrine of whose heart burn day and night, undimmed, The Light of Heaven, the spark of life."

"Full of life now, compact, visible,
I, forty years old, the eighty-third year of the States,
To one a century hence or any number of centuries hence,
To you yet unborn these, seeking you.
When you read these, I that was visible am become invisible,
Now it is you, compact, visible, realizing my poems, seeking me,
Fancying how happy you were if I could be with you and become your comrade ;
Be it as if I were with you. (Be not too certain

but I am now with you.)
("Calamus", "Full Of Life Now")

Among the men and women the multitude,
I perceive one picking me out by secret and divine signs,
Acknowledging none else, not parent, wife, husband,brother,child, any nearer than I am,
Some are baffled, but that one is not—that one knows me.
("Calamus", "Among The Multitude")

"Sometimes with one I love I fill myself with rage for fear I effuse unreturn'd love,
But now I think there is no unreturn'd love, the pay is certain one way or another,
(I loved a certain person ardently and my love was not return'd,
Yet out of that I have written these songs.)"
("Calamus", "Sometimes With One I Love")

How wonderful grows my thankfulness, how tearful my eye, when I read the message of the Tenth Guru, "See me in my disciple". And we have sung for hundreds of years "Glory, Glory to Great Guru Gobind Singh. He himself is the Master and the Disciple".

That shadow my likeness that goes to and fro seeking a livelihood, chattering, chaffering,
How often I find myself standing and looking at it where it flits,
How often I question and doubt whether that is really me ;

But among my lovers and carolling these songs,
O I never doubt whether that is really me.
("Calamus", "That Shadow My Likeness")

Let us twain walk aside from the rest,
And we are together privately, so you discard ceremony,
Come, vouchsafe to me what has yet been vouchsafed to none—tell me the whole story,
Tell me what you would not tell your brother, wife, husband, or physician.

VI

THE WAR, THE SIKH SPIRIT AND WALT WHITMAN

The poems written by Whitman on war have a unique distinction for us, the Sikhs, in the Punjab where we, once, under the banner of Guru Gobind Singh, rose to die.

Our Master, Guru Gobind Singh, called us to death and extinction, for he felt that it was no use living at all without the sense and light of liberty in us.. Guru Gobind Singh gave such a vital and martial timbre even to our prayers that we, for the first time in the history of India, saw that the great love to which our Master was calling was not a prayer of the crushed people, but a prayer of the victorious as Guru Nanak, the First True King, had called us not to love the Beautiful God-Person of Nature and Creation, but to be so beautiful as to be loved by Him. *Bhakti* feelings of our devotion to God are not of the miserable man who in his utter smallness dares rise to evolve systems by which to perfect himself as a lover, as a saint, as a seer, but we wait in intense activity to be loved by Him. Few understand this silent revolution of ideals. To the terrified slaves of this country, Guru Gobind Singh said : "Rise and fight and die fighting on horseback." This is an oceanic burst of the same glow of life, and this too is

of Him. It is more glorious to die than to live as miserable wretches. He poured into our veins that life which could not love without song and freedom. We rose as individuals and as masses shouting for liberty and victory. He gave us freedom of the soul, and we cried for the freedom of our life. We died for it, never mind, if we never got it. Touched by his inspiration, we could no more remain slaves.

John Bailey sketches the spiritual change that the declaration of war in America wrought on Walt, and how his poetry was inspired with some deeper majesty and an unspeakable serenity during the war. The poet of peace rose one morning and found himself the poet of war. "No soldier," writes Mr. Bailey, "who fought in the ranks showed more than Whitman of these greatest gifts of war; and the war taught him not only how to do his chosen work in the hospitals, but how to give shape to his thoughts and experiences in some of the noblest war poems which have been written." Certainly, there are none in the world which are closer to the actual facts; only a few of those written in the Great War can compare with them in beauty which is afraid of no truth, and the truth which in all its nakedness is yet seen to be beauty. Again, all genius has inconsistencies, which to the measures of mere logic make it appear untrue to itself. Literature partakes of the rarity and fluidity of life, while logic and science have a rigid fixity, which, however necessary, seems like death to the freed eyes of art. The greatest books of the worlds, notably those which we call the Bible, are full of pairs of sentences which teach the many-sidedness of truth by

daring to stand in flat contradiction to each other. So here in these *Drum Taps*, we have Whitman returning boldly upon himself. He who had ridiculed war as the forgotten and superseded theme of the poets of the old world now sounds the trumpet call with a note of the most uncompromising insistence :-

Beat ! beat ! drums !—blow ! bugles ! blow !
Through the windows—through doors—burst like a ruthless force,
Into the solemn church, and scatter the congregation,
Into the school where the scholar is studying;
Leave not the bridegroom quiet—no happiness must he have now with his bride,
Nor the peaceful farmer any peace, ploughing his field or gathering his grain,
So fierce you whirr and pound you drums—so shrill you bugles blow.

("Drum-Taps")

And this poetic transformation of the mind of Walt comes so close to us in our homes in the Punjab that I now feel that when in my book, *The Spirit of the Sikh*, I was seeking to relate Walt Whitman to that page of Sikh history which has been most misunderstood by some of the empty-souled Hindu intellectuals, I was not far wrong in my imagination to have seen in these poems of war by Whitman a poetic history of the Great Revolution of the Spirit in the Punjab caused in the minds of his disciples by Guru Gobind Singh's spiritual genius. The songs of peace in the *Guru Grantha* were being sung as usual at Anandpur, the seat of our Master, but he had a

large drum specially made to send forth his Song of the Sword. He called it the *Ranjit*, the Victory Drum. It was of an enormous size.

At Anandpur stood Guru Gobind Singh by the side of his drum, contemplating the liberty of his people. There is a complete change in the colour and shape of the gathering of the disciples around him. A new nation came fully armed at Anandpur. The Sikh history shows how they fought, but it was all a poetic action. It was waged in the songs of the Great Guru to inspirit his people. The War had commenced in the Guru's poems. His impassioned lyrics of war, "The Battle of Bhangani" in *Chandi-Charitra*, sound in our ears still. Life rooted in Truth was allowed by Guru Gobind Singh to take the new course of the flood and the storm. "Beat, beat drums, sound, blow bugles, blow", echoes the war spirit of the Khalsa. The war-like tones and that clash of steel and that spiritual impatience to die, which we find in the pages of our history, can really be appreciated in Whitman's poems. Surely, no historical accounts show us the poetic genius of Guru Gobind Singh, manifested and enlarged in those wars which were waged, as he says, without any rhyme or reason against him by the enemies of his thought and Ideal. The low-statured Hindu kings and the Moghuls could not endure Guru Gobind Singh being hailed as the 'True King" of the people. It was the repetition of the same qualms of the Jews of Palestine against Jesus Christ. The attitude of the sick upper ten towards Him reminds us of the causeless jealousy of the Jews directed against the Son of God. Crucifixion of the one is seen here in our

history as the crucifixion of the multitudes. And similar to the poetic soul-change of Walt Whitman, though on a larger scale, is the historical contradiction of our lyrical genius of peace becoming the martyr's glory of death for the rights of man. Like Whitman, our silent poets, our mothers and sisters have been voluntary nurses in these poetic wars of Guru Gobind Singh and after. The saints enlisted as ordinary soldiers in love of Him. And our saints who chanted songs were the first in the world to organise a society similar in purpose to the present-day Red Cross Society. They did go inside the camps of friend and foe alike serving, the wounded.

Our Master, Guru Gobind Singh, has not been understood in the land of his birth by such Hindu poets of poetic spirituality as Rabindra Nath Tagore and by such men of action as Gandhi, because both of them are too much of the old Hindu, and unlike Whitman, have not the poetic genius to return boldly upon themselves and say, "Do I contradict myself, Very well, then, I contradict myself. . I contract myself. I am .. I am large, I contain multitudes." Contradiction, infinite contradiction of the directions of the leaves and branches spreading out in a serrated expanse, is sign of life, when the root is well-grounded. This was Guru's plan of his divine humanity. Not that we for ourselves mind this ignorant depreciation of our Liberator by these eminent Hindus, but that, by so doing, they show their own effeteness and bankruptcy of spirit. Incidentally, it also shows how they lost their country through such vague inanities. Without the cleaving sword, Guru Gobind Singh found no way to get out

of these *maya*-meshes of the Hindu stupor and stupidities. It is with peculiar satisfaction, therefore, that we turn away from our country to find our Guru's Ideals being celebrated and voiced forth in distant Japan where the spirit of Bushido, the Flash of Sword, mingles with the Nirvanic Peace of the Buddha both in life and art, and in the well-balanced artistic consciousness of Japan. And still farther away we hear it in the chants of Democracy in the America of Walt Whitman's visions. We, too, do not believe in the Democracy of vote, but in the Democracy of the enlarged vision of man. And whatever Walt Whitman may say, he sings an Ideal America where he kisses the thick black lips of the Negro with the same ardour with which he puts his lips to the rose-lips of an American girl or boy. He is a freed man in whose eyes all is good, all is glorious. Nothing is lacking. Perfection nestles in grossness and slag. He is free of all colour and caste notions of the miserable modern people of the West. His America puts her long arms round continents, and makes them indissoluble. Miserable indeed must be the narrow-mindedness of the modern White that shuts its door to the Hindus, and refuses them a settlement even in the Rockies ! But the unregenerated world around here in India, or in America, is yet not reborn of the spirit. As the individual is to receive the baptism of the fire of soul, so have the societies the need to be spirit-born. Till then, we have only to look up and wait. To cultivate one true man, Nature requires centuries. To cultivate one thought or one feeling, a man needs his whole life. It is in appreciation of this fact that the great

inspired beings sing in spite of all grossness around them. They see what we know not, and see not. We seek our kinship in the dream-lands of the poets and the prophets all over the universe. In the sadly beautiful and serenely mysterious atmosphere created by the war poems of Walt, in which he seems to be still passing like an angel, from one wounded to the other, lifting the veils of coffins and looking at the dead under the moonlight, saying very little, yet feeling deep in silence, sinking deep with sympathy into the inscrutable mystery of life and death, one, for the first time, knows that for the chastening of human mind, there can perhaps be no substitute for war and those tragic and pathetic deaths on the battlefield !

Our Guru Gobind saw that there was no other way to breathe life into the dead masses of the Punjab, but by arming them and beating drums, and flashing sabres in the glare of the sun. Dead ye are, rise to die, perchance to catch the spark of life in the battlefields! Guru Har Gobind roamed, as the sun did set on the battlefield of Amritsar, wiping blood from the faces of his wounded disciples, nursing them and pouring into their soul his comfort and blessing. Guru Gobind Singh joined the Muktsar battlefield like the divine father of his children giving them his soul.

We, the Sikhs, had our Resurrection *en masse* at the Master's word, sung in our ears on the battlefields. The war gave us the fiery baptism of God's warm blood. We died. And that is how our Master said we should live. There is no other door to everlasting life but through death, like this, through love, and

obedience like this. Very little life is in the ego of man; all is there in the shining sun of His soul. He knew all about the nature of after-death; He led us on. Those who lay too much stress on peace and non-violence have yet not got rid of the ignorance which shuts them away from the Realities of the Unseen beyond the wall of Death. Their ethics are not cosmic, and "spherical", but only "geometrical," and hence, mere artificial and conceptual ethics which have no relation with life, its growth and destiny. These miserable ethics, made by the "geometrical" conceptual minds like those of the Brahmanical moralists and philosophers, are but lifeless rules and regulations so made to soothe the excited intellects of those who are gods to themselves, and who wish to cast the cosmic processes of the universe in their own thinking. Our Guru in communion with the cosmic processes concentrated his consciousness on the problem of making man alive, natural and free. "I announce Natural persons to rise, I announce the justification of candour and pride." It is not the so-called ethical conduct that shall be counted, but the character of life that shall be formed by passing through a thousand fires and waters and hells of vice and heavens of virtue, which shall be of the true creation. Small and miserable are those mentalists who conceive the moral law in terms of their prejudices and likes and dislikes, their oughts and ought-nots. The moral law is cosmic, and it prevails in spite of our wars and peace, in spite of our vice and virtue. Seeds are scattered here by the winds, and the blossoms burst forth on the Tree of Life in the

Unseen. Those who know of this and that side of death do not take any account of the man-made artificial ethics, for they all partake of human ignorance.

We, the Sikhs, dedicated soldiers of the Master, are already on the march on the open road, and we feel the war poems of Walt Whitman indistinguishably mingle with the chants of our Master. And these chants pour life into us, while the tame, "geometrical" ethics of the Jain and the Hindu extinguish the flame in our human breasts in spite of a thousand cobwebs of fine theories, and the still finer wishes of man to escape death somehow, especially by avoiding war and the battlefieids !

Beat ! beat ! drums !—blow ! bugles ! blow !

— — — — —

Leave not the bridegroom quiet—no happiness must he have now with his bride .....*[1]

It is difficult to translate our chants, but one may be given in original here to indicate the power that is in its very sound, and how these very lilts wage a war in their solemn enthusiasm :

Khag, Khand, bihandang khal dal khandung
Ati run mandang barmandag,
Bhuj dand Askhandang tej Parchandang,
Jot amandang bhan prabhang
Sukh santang karnang durmat Haznang
Kil bikh harnung, as saranang
Jai Jai jag karang sristitaubarang
Mum prati parnang jai Tegung.

("The Songs of the Sword")—Guru Gobind Singh

1. The call went forth from the Master, and Joga Singh left his bride in the temple the ceremony uncompleted, on to the battlefield.

In the chants of our Master, the cannons boom, the arrows fly, the swords clash, and the very repetition of his chants makes us fly like flames, crying liberty liberty, liberty.

So did we at Anandpur declare the armed age, as Whitman says of 1861 :

"Arm'd year—year of the struggle,
No dainty rhymes or sentimental love verses for you terrible year,
Not you as some pale poetling seated at a desk lisping cadenzas piano,
But as a strong man erect, clothed in blue clothes[1] advancing carrying a rifle on your shoulder,
With well-gristled body and sunburnt face and hands, *with a knife in the belt at your side*[2],
As I heard you shouting loud, your sonorous voice ringing across the continent,
Your masculine voice, O year, as rising amid the great cities."

(*Drum-Taps*, "Eighteen Sixty-one")

"To the drum-taps prompt,
The young men falling in and arming,
The mechanics arming (the trowel, the jack-plane, the blacksmith's hammer, tost aside with precipitation,)
The lawyer leaving his office, and arming, the judge leaving the court,
The driver deserting his wagon in the street,

1. The Akali armies of Guru Gobind Singh were clad in *blue clothes*, and in shining steel, sword, *chakra*, and arrow and bow.
2. Every Sikh even now is supposed to carry a small sword in the belt at the side; it is called *kirpan*.

jumping down, throwing the reins abruptly down on the horses' backs,

The salesman leaving the store, the boss, book keeper, porter all leaving....

— — — — —

The blood of the city up—armed, ! armed ! the cry everywhere,

The flags flung out from the steeples of churches, and from all the public buildings and stores,

The tearful parting, the mother kisses her son, the son kisses his mother,

(Loth is the mother to part, yet not a word does she speak to detain him,)

— — — —

War ! an armed race is advancing ! the welcome for battle, no turning away;

War ! be it weeks, months, or years, an armed race is advancing to welcome it."

(*Drum-Taps* "First O Songs for a Prelude")

The Khalsa is a new comer, fresh from the eternity into the world. The eyes of the Khalsa glow with the vision of the Invisible. The millions on the other side of the River of Life mingle their voices, and the Khalsa is truly one in many. When he runs, he is in trance. On the bed of thorns, he lies on roses. Outside is immaterial; it is the aim of life that matters. The Khalsa is he who has found the Centre of Life and has enshrined God in the temple of his heart. The Khalsa looks at the world from a supreme height, blessing all, helping all, loving all, with his beautiful looks from the inner self of all life.

The Khalsa in ordinary life proves himself a

loving husband, a kind father, a noble friend, a selfless saint, and a brave soldier to defend the honour of the weak.

This world with all its gay gardens is to the Khalsa but a camping ground. The Khalsa holds the present life to be but a camp life. Death has no sting for him. If a child is born, he is a "Guru's soldier come", and when he dies, it's a "Guru's soldier gone." The Khalsa sees and believes all as good; nothing is amiss. It is, therefore, when he prays, that he speaks in accents of steel, flint, fire and lightning that move the Heavens with him.

The tent of the Khalsa is a temple. The Khalsa is the "*Dharamshala*" for all. The Khalsa gives a drink, a repast and a hymn of the Guru to all who pass by. The Khalsa has his own language whose flame-words reflect the inner glory of our National Realisation, and of that joy which is supreme in its conquest over the sorrows of the world. The Sikh Gurus have introduced thirty-four new words for "joy" into the Punjabi language.

Similarly, a whole new idiom has been evolved by the Khalsa to describe the ordinary and common place things of life. This is, indeed, 'camp' language, and authenticates the Sikh soldier's love of life and his boundless optimism. A single soldier styles himself as *sawa lakh* or a hundred thousand & a quarter. When he has run out of his food or rations, he says, "The kitchen is tipsy with joy !" The lame in this language are called "beautiful-footed", the blind "the sun-eyed", for they all are "Jewels of the Guru" !

Alas, the Khalsa too is getting under the self-

hypnotism of "being something", "doing something", and is thus degenerating into a common man ! Instead of the old "tent life", it is the life of the palace that pleases him. This world is getting to be everything to him. The new Khalsa is getting daily into mud, and unless something happens to restore to him his true faith in God and the Guru-finding expression in every thought and action, a type, wondrous in its grandeur and expression, would be gone.

But this is not the Khalsa that is decaying. That is the Khalsa there which is ever coming into blossom.

So is Walt's democracy not there in America, it's perhaps nowhere yet, that sweet Divine poetic Democracy ! Behold, the* Khalsa in the poems of Walt there ! Have you seen there yonder ?

*The word *Khalsa* means 'the pure one', and is commonly used for the Sikh as a community.

VII
A GARDEN OF THOUGHTS

Walt never thinks in the ordinary sense. He is quiet, empty of thought, like the animals grazing on the turf with their faces fixed downward. He is mentally speaking, an absolute blank, and harbours no anxiety to compose his poems. He has never the self-preparation of an intellectual scholar. Walt gets a line that flashes on him like the silver thread of lightning in a forest of pines, and he repeats it. By repetition, he catches fast, so to say, the edge of the garment of a whole poem, and just then, he lures it out of the Infinite and embraces it as if he found by the merest chance a fairy of Heaven who came to love him, but hid herself behind the trees. I know of this inspirational way of thinking, because evidently, I have been admitted, in confidence, into the methods of work of our great Sikh poet, Bhai Vir Singh. He told me, how he, while fast asleep, heard a line, and awoke singing it. The rest of the poem comes out of her cave, as he sweetly sings and calls her out; the fairies arrive at the lute-call of the poet.

I am, therefore, interested in Walt's thoughts, as in the thoughts of Bhai Vir Singh, not from the standpoint of a scholar, but from that of a devotee of verse. How similar is the bird-catching of their poems by these two poets? They do not think, as I have said; they catch the birds of heaven and give them a perch

on their thumbs !

Bhai Vir Singh has brought down from Heaven the new meaning of the Hymns of His Masters, for he has devoted his whole life to the interpretation of the great truths for us, and to the delineation of the whole Sikh history, as it shines in panoramic scenes in his soul. These scenes are precipitated in the sympathetic transparency of his inner illumination. It is like the following that I find him singing in his prose poem "Mohina Sohina" :

I see Anandpur, the city of Guru Gobind Singh,
I see the trees of the garden of Anadpur,
I see the light of the Guru illuminating the city,
It is the light that adorns the rivers and woods,
I see the flowers growing in his garden,
I see his florists picking in the morning fresh-blown jasmines,
I see the garlands being made for the Guru.
And a song quivers out of the throats of the gardens
Flowers, flowers ye are blessed,
Blessed is the death that invited ye with the Beloved,
Blessed flowers, Blessed flowers, ye have the joy of your good luck,
Blessed flowers, Blessed flowers of the Great Garden of His Love.
There is Sohina, Mohina,
There is the Mother knocking with her belt-knife at the door of the gardeners,
There the sitars quiver,
There the hearts tremble,

There is the music vibrating,
There is the new Man coming,
There is the new Man coming,
There is the God on foot,.....

He makes the scenes of our history float up in his vision; he writes the history of our soul. His writings are rich with the joy of his soul. The most wonderful thing about them is that there hover over his page the Invisible Friends whose presence creates that ecstatic climate of the soul which charms us all. Meanings of the Hymns of His Masters come as a blazing revolution against the old, musty, crude Brahmanical mentality which had completely concealed the Guru's Newness from the Disciples.

And then, Walt's thoughts are so similar to ours that sometimes we wonder how they can, at all, be called American in the great Yankee sense of gigantic deals of oils and motor cars :

"I have heard what the talkers were talking, the talk of the beginning and the end,
But I do not talk of the beginning or the end".
("Song of Myself," Section 3)

The wonder is always and always how there can be a mean man or an infidel."
("Song of Myself," Section 22)

"A morning glory at my window satisfies me more than the metaphysics of books."
("Song of Myself," Section 24)

"Dazzling and tremendous, how quick the sunrise would kill me,

If I could not now and always send sun-rise out of me."

("Song of Myself," Section 25)

Writing and talk do not prove me,
I carry the plenum of proof and everything else in my face,
With the hush of my lips I wholly confound the skeptic.

("Song of Myself," Section 25)

Logic and sermons never convince,
The damp of the night drives deeper into my soul.
(Only what proves itself to every man and woman is so,
Only what nobody denies is so.)

("Song of Myself," Section 33)

My ties and ballasts leave me, my elbows rest in sea-gaps,
I skirt sierras, my palms cover continents,
I am afoot with my vision.

("Song of Myself," Section 33)

Behold ! do not give lectures or a little charity
When I give I give myself.

("Song of Myself," Section 40)

All has been gentle with me, I keep no account with lamentation.
(What have I to do with lamentation ?)

("Song of Myself," Section 44)

You are also asking me questions and I hear you,

I answer that I cannot answer, you must find out for yourself.

("Song of Myself," Section 46)

I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.

("Song of Myself," Section 52)

I bequeathe myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again, look for me under your boot-soles.

("Song of Myself," Section 52)

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless
And filter and fibre your blood.

("Song of Myself," Section 52)

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you.

("Song of Myself," Section 52)

— — — — —

Only themselves understand themselves and the like of themselves,
As souls only understand souls.

("By the Roadside," 'Perfections')

And we read in the word of the Guru :
They do not meet who sit close to each other,
They meet who are separated by great distances, but whose consciousness pulsates into the

other's consciousness, whose souls unite.

Come, I will make the continent indissoluble,
I will make the most splendid race the sun ever shown upon,
I will make divine magnetic lands,
With the love of comrades,
With the life-long love of comrades.

I will plant companionship thick as trees all along the rivers of America, and along the shores of the great lakes, and all over the prairies,
I will make inseparable cities with their arms about each other's necks,
By the love of comrades,
By the manly love of comrades.

("Calamus," 'For you O Democracy')

When the Guru's Sikh is seen,
I fall down, I fall down at his feet,
Great is the idea of Brotherhood,
Indescribable is the pitch of life in which the brothers gather, the brothers gather.

(Guru Nanak)

(I loved a certain person ardently and my love was not return'd,
Yet out of that I have written these songs.)

("Calamus," 'Sometimes With One I Love')

How beggarly appear arguments before a defiant deed !
How the floridness of the materials of cities shrivels before a man's or woman's look.

("Song of the Broad-Axe," Section 6)

Your road I enter upon and look around, I believe you are not all that is here,
I believe that much unseen is also here.

("Song of the Road", Section 2)

They see, I can see them not,
Great is the amazement of the Unseen.

(Guru Nanak in the *Japji*)

I inhale great draughts of space,
The East and the West are mine, and the North and the South are mine :
I am larger, better than I thought,
I did not know I held so much goodness.

My call is the call of battle
I nourish active rebellion,
He going with me must go *well-armed**[1]
He going with me goes often with spare diet, poverty, angry enemies, desertions.*

(The life of the Guru's Khalsa,as in Sikh history, is the demonstration of this deep spiritual call.)

Strange and hard that paradox true I give,
Objects gross and the unseen soul are one.

("A Song for Occupations", Section 5)

(In the *Sukhmani*, Guru Arjan Dev says,the subtle soul is solid universe, and the solid universe is but a dream in the soul.)

Here, in the following saying of his, Walt

[1]* Guru Gobind ordains that all prayers should be uttered by first saluting Him with a drawn naked sword, "the camp language of the Khalsa".

succinctly sums up the attitude of a truly great that man :

That whatever tastes sweet and the most perfect man,

That is finally right.

(This is the standard of our sense of right. The conscience theory is an exploded myth with us.)

That clean-shaped children can be jetted and conceived only where natural forms prevail in public and the human face and forms are never caricatured.

(No one felt this truth and promulgated it with greater authority than our Tenth Guru.)

And that genius need never be turned to romances,

For facts properly told, how mean appear all romances,

Think of the time when you were not born,

Think of the time you stood at the side of the dying,

I think of the time when your own body will be dying.

This is a translation, so it seems to us, of a thousand similar hymns in the *Sukhmani* and in the *Japji*.

I think of the womanhood and you to be a woman

The creation is womanhood,

(This is Guru Nanak's symbolic saying.)

He sings like a woman fond of man, of His Beloved.

Charity and personal force are the only investments worth anything.

("Autumn Rivulets", 'Song of Prudence'

Heroes are they who give themselves away and turn not their back on Truth.

(*Guru Grantha*)

The soul has that measureless pride which revolts from every lesson but its own.

("Autumn Rivulets", 'Song of Prudence')

Great is the disease of pride,
But great is the cure of it in the Noble Pride.

(*Guru Grantha*)

Are those billions of men really gone ?

Are those women of the old experience of the earth gone ?

Do their lives, cities, arts, rest only with us ?

Did they achieve nothing for good for themselves ?

I believe of all those men and women that fill'd the unnamed lands, every one exists this hour here or elsewhere, invisible to us,

In exact proportion to what he or she grew from in life, and out of what he or she did, felt, became, loved, sinn'd, in life.

("Autumn Rivulets", 'Unnamed Lands')

(All our Gurus speak of the Unseen Realms of souls, the immortals.) We read in the *Japji* :

There are the Unseen Realms where beauty is shaped, where consciousness is cast,...

One understands only when one sees these Realms,

No word-paintings can picture them for us,

There are many Queens as Sitas in Glory whose beauty is what no one can tell who hath seen it not,
There are congregations of saints in bliss whose minds and hearts are in tune with God.

(*Guru Grantha*)

I suspect I shall meet them there,
I suspect I shall there find each old particular of those unnamed lands.

("Autumn Rivulets", 'Unnamed Lands')

We in the East lay our heads at the Feet of the Saints. Walt vindicates the mood of our highest poet and combines the ideal of a *Bikhu* in the following :

What you give me I cheerfully accept,
A little sustenance, a hut and garden, a little money, as I rendevous with my poems,
A traveler's lodging and breakfast as I journey through the States–why should I be ashamed to own such gifts ? why to advertise for them ?
For I myself am not one who bestows nothing upon man and woman,
For I bestow upon any man or woman the entrance to all the gifts of the universe.

("By the Roadside", 'To Rich Givers')

Guru Gobind Singh's Khalsa announces all this 200 years before the advent of Walt in America. I invite those interested in pursuing this strange identity, more than I have done, to ponder the mystery of Sikh life, tradition and inspiration as revealed in Sikh

history and scriptures.

I announce a life that shall be copious, vehement, spiritual bold,
I announce an end that shall lightly and joyfully meet its translation.
I announce myriads of youth, beautiful, gigantic, sweet-blooded,
I announce a race of splendid and savage old men.

("Songs of Parting," 'So Long')

When we read in the *Japji* our masters picturing the universe as a procession, in the form of a choir of singers coming through ages, and in the *Sukhmani* as the whole creation in procession passing, we know what Walt wants to say :

(All is a procession,
The universe is a procession with measured and perfect motion.)

("Children of Adam," 'I Sing The Body Electric')

Our masters called us *Pantha*, a path or a road. The Sikh is a path. How nearer home is the meaning to us of the following :

To take your lovers on the road with you, for all that you leave them behind you,
To know the universe itself as a road, as many roads, as roads for traveling souls.

("Song of the Open Road")

Remarkably oriental are the ideas of Walt Whitman on beauty, art, and poetry. We in the East are not much enamoured of buildings ; we think of the soul of the Builders. All our definitions of art

and beauty are from the standpoint where the true artist stands to look at life.

The pen-portrait of a prophet-poet—the one whom we have worshipped now for ages, and whose stray glimpses we catch in a wanderer with love-dyed eyes, roaming in the streets of Kapilvastu, or Amritsar, whom we meet by the merest chance under a *banyan* tree—comes back to us from America in the words of Walt. His whole poem, "The Answerer," has an altogether Asiatic setting. If we in Asia have contributed anything to the culture of man, it is our good work of having had always amongst us, in all ages, the man whose silhouette is the poem called "The Answerer."

He puts things in their attitudes,
— — — —
His insight and power encircle things and the human race,
He is the glory and extract thus far of things and of the human race.
All this time and at all times wait the words of true poems,
The words of true poems do not merely please,
The true poets are not followers of beauty but the august masters of beauty.....
("Song of the Answerer")

When we in the East stand face to face with the true poet, we pour our soul at his feet. We are as his bond slaves. So vast and mysterious is the Radiation of His Soul, that we say, "all things get their grace from Him." His presence makes things beautiful. He

is all our art, poetry, and life's fulfilment. Seeing him, we throw away our books and our notions of beauty. We feel nothing else is so beautiful as he. And we daily then realise : "The true poets are not followers of beauty but the august masters of beauty."

In this one line comes before my eyes the future revolution in the art ideals of the Western people. The poets and prophets in the West all follow beauty, and so do their arts. Art, instead of being an excitant or a precipitant of beauty before our eyes, becomes, according to our masters, a life of continual inspiration. Beauty gathers round the Beloved; nothing else before the Beloved any more seems beautiful.

In "To the Leaven'd Soil they Trod" one finds how he mixes his body, the body of his songs with the dust of the soil, how he dies and how his song ripens by the 'hot sun of the South". Its pathos is cosmic ; its lilt is of the music of the inner man. It penetrates into the very soul of man.

In this serene garden atmosphere, one finds that the common vice and virtue form at last the manure and sod for some stray rose to blossom. And it is possible, vice and sin form a richer manure than virtue. And we understand afresh the message of Guru Arjan Dev when he says that at the Door of Death, the *Yama* puts no value on our vice and virtue;he lets us pass on to the Regions of Freedom and Love, if we have lived in Him, the Beloved. And, again, says the Guru in the *Sukmani* "All these relative considerations of vice and virtue are myths".Have we mixed our

body and self and soul in the sod which bears His Footprints, and have we suspired as roses in Him, while we lived on this earth ? So corresponding to our Guru's ideas are the following lines :

What blurt is this about virtue and about vice ?

Evil propels me, and reform of evil propels me, I stand indifferent.

My gait is no fault-finde's or rejecter's gait.

I moisten the roots of all that has grown.

"To the leaven'd soil they trod calling I sing for the last,

Forth from my tent emerging for good, loosing, untying the tent ropes,

In the freshness the forenoon air, in the far-stretching circuits and vistas, again to peace restored,

To the fiery fields emanative and the endless vistas beyond to the South and the North,

To the leaven's soil of the general Western world to attest my songs,

To the Alleghanian hills and the tireless Miss-issippi,

To the rocks I calling, sing, and all the trees in the woods,

— — — — —

To the plains, of the poems of heroes, to the prairies spreading wide,

To the far-off sea and the unseen winds and the same impalapable air;

And responding they answer all, (but not in words)

The average earth, the witness of war and peace, acknowledges mutely,

The prairie draws me close, as the father to bosom broad the son,

The Northern ice and rain that began me nourish me to the end,

But the hot sun of the South is to fully ripen my song.

("Drum-Taps," 'To The Leaven'd Soul They Trod')

A great city is that which has the greatest men and women.

If it be a few ragged huts it is still the greatest city in the whole world.

("Song of the Broad-Axe")

It would be interesting to give here a translation of a hymn from the *Guru Grantha* :

A man,

He lived in a broken hut,

He had no caste, no rank in this world,

So poor no one noticed him as he walked along the roads of life,

All alone, no friend, he had, no support,

He had no wealth, nor beauty of features,

He had no blood relations to claim him,

But he was the king of creation,

His mind was immersed in *Nam*,

From him did drip the Honey of Love.

It one gets the gift of the dust of the feet of such as he, it is the sign of divine grace, for annointed with this dust, a man becomes a man.

And again :

"Better the cottage where the nobleness of His Love and Praise dwells,
And burnt be the palaces that have not Him."

Those who live with the Beloved never perish,
I see them standing there in eternity, how bright are the figures of Love,
The garlands of riches and diamonds and pearls sparkle on their necks,
I long for the life-dust of their feet,
There are standing there, doing the service of Love,
The garlands of riches and diamonds and pearls sparkle on their necks.

— — — — —

The place where a great city stands is not the place of stretche'd wharves, and docks, manufacturers, deposits of produce merely,

— — — — —

Where the city stands with the brawniest breed of orators and bards,
Where the city stands that is belov'd by these, and loves them in return and understands them,
Where no monuments exist to heroes but in the common words and deeds....

— — — — —

Where children are taught to be laws to themselves and to depend on themselves,
Where equanimity is illustrated in affairs,
Where speculations on the soul are encouraged,
Where women walk in public processions in the streets the same as the men,
Where they enter the public assembly and take places the same as the men;
Where the city of the faithfulest friends stands,
Where the city of the cleanliness of the sexes stands,
Where the city of the healthiest fathers stands,
Where the city of the best-bodied mothers stands,
There the great city stands.

— — — — —

"The bare arm of the girl crosses the bare breast of her lover, they press close without lust, his lips press her neck."

— — — —

A show of the summer softness—a contact of something unseen—an amour of the light and air,
I am jealous and overwhelm'd with friendliness,
And will go gallivant with the light and air myself.

("The Sleepers")

All comes by the body, only health puts you rapport with the universe
Produce great Persons, the rest follows.

("By Blue Ontario's Shore")

The following poem is descriptive of the Khalsa as he was born in the Punjab.

Great were the times, enthusiasm flowed out of human heart like a sea. And truly that coming of the Khalsa is the coming of a new nation on earth. An historian of the Sikh period says :

The Khalsa came ready-made from the brain of

Guru Gobind Singh as did Minerva from Jupitar's head.
A Nation announcing itself,
I myself make the only growth by which I can be appreciated,
I reject none, accept all, then reproduce all in my own forms.
A breed whose proof is in time and deeds,
What we are we are, nativity is answer enough to objections,
We wield ourselves as a weapon is wielded,
We are powerful and tremendous in ourselves,
We are executive in ourselves, we are sufficient in the variety of ourselves,
We are the most beautiful to ourselves, and in ourselves,
We stand self-pois'd in the middle, branching thence over the world....

— — — — —

My foothold is tenon'd and mortis'd in granite,
I laugh at what you call dissolution,
And I know the amptitude of time.

— — — ("Song of Myself")

Smile O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth !
Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees !
Earth of the departed sunset—earth of the mountains misty-topt,
Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged with blue !
Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the river !

Earth of the limpid gray of cloud brighters and clearer for my sake !
Far-swooping elbow'd earth—rich-apple-blossom'd earth !
Smile, for your lover comes.

('Song of Myself")

I fly those flights of a fluid and swallowing soul,
My course runs below the soundings of plummets.
I help myself to material and immaterial,
No guard can shut me off, no law prevent me.
I anchor my ship for a little while only,
My messengers continually cruise away or bring their returns to me.

("Song of Myself")

Agonies are one of my changes of garments,
I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the wounded person,
My hurts turn livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe.

("Song of Myself")

VIII
SWEET INSANITY

Exuberance of spiritual intoxication comes to our poet-prophets Oriental whose eyes are red, and who roam in tattered garments in love of the Beautiful beyond themselves, in utter abandonment, ecstatic. They do not live in the body centre, their eyes show that, unlike us, they live on some other plane and in some other centre of life. At times, they are exquisitely insane so that we seem to lose all points of contact with them. It is a strange exaltation of mystic realisations, which comes to them, unawares. And we in the East have heard words from them, so incoherent, so sweetly insane that we understand but little; so sublime becomes their attitude. And they in that exquisite state become child-like. They find everything so beautiful. From their lips fall honeyed words. And if they repeat the same words, the fascination cast about it is like the one a great singer may exert on his audience. In that sweet insane mood, they have the glow of a new bride on their faces. Why words, mere simple looks bestowed on us make us wild with joy ! In that state, I know, mere naming things grows to be the highest form of poetry. Their babbling is beautiful. I find this insane naming of things as poems in Walt's chants, and this art of his fascinates me in a similar way, for I am already in spontaneous sympathy with that state of exuberance, above body

and above mind, of which that childlike incoherent babbling is a symptom and sign. I say, once again, I feel happy that Whitman was neither a rhymist nor a metrist, neither a musician nor any such artist. He is so deeply full of soul that to dwell on such things seems to him a sign of spiritual bankruptcy of the so-called poets and critics, full of words and their architecture. He is more solemn and serious than a dancer or a rhymster.

The poet's function is to vitalise his age with a new vislon of the soul. Poetry is not merely an expression of the poet's soul state, it is, also, the radiant effect that the presence of the poet in person and his word produce. *Leaves of Grass*, wrote Symmonds, "tumbled the world and pride down for me. *Leaves of Grass* which I just read at the age of twenty five influenced me more perhaps than any other book has done, except the Bible, more than Plato, more than Goethe. It is impossible for me to speak critically of what so deeply entered into the fibre and marrow of my being". And York Powel wrote to Whitman," "Your *Leaves of Grass* I keep with my Shakespeare and my Bible; and it is from these three I have got more sympathy than from any other books" R. L. S. says :

"I come next to Whitman's "Leaves of Grass", a book of singular service, a book which tumbled the world upside down for me, blew into space a thousand cobwebs of genteel and ethical illusion, and,having thus shaken my tabernacle of lies, set me back again upon a strong foundation of all original and manly virtues".

When a man of cosmic consciousness like our

Walt names things, mere naming, as I have said above by such a person becomes poetry, because of his great integrating vision. His vision impinges like intense light on a common thing, and surrounds it immediately with a divine nimbus. To look at such a thing with that nimbus divine made of the mist of deliria of joy is poetry itself. Not only one who sings in that state, but one who sees and hears is also a poet. Mostly when Walt is repeating names, he is seeing things in that glory of which we know very little. This seemingly absurd repetition can be likened to the soothing repetition of the name of one's beloved, but from the lips of one who is deeply, inextricably, immersed in that exquisite feeling for the beloved. If Majnun in the Arabian desert spent all his life in repeating the name of his beloved *Leili,* or in tracing so feelingly her name on the sands, surely there is something within man akin to inspired love which can infect us with the wondrous glow of its repetition of a single name. So much, so true, it is as a single feeling of worship repeated for centuries that makes a flight of stone stairs in a Japanese park temple almost a soul, and a cherry a or a plum tree, almost a living being. One cannot intonate such poems, and that is the main difficulty about them. Such poems are the food of the soul; they have not to be read or sung, but made a part of one's soul. The reader has yet to rise that height where a little spark of inner illumination grows into a clear transparency in which all objects and events are precipitated as real solid living images, just as one thinks of them. The whole Universe, the sun and the moon, all come and

stand in that Super Space. "All is within the consciousness, what seems without," says our Guru Nanak. It is said Nizami was composing *Shahnama*, seated on a little palm leaf-mat, when an intellectualist asked aim, "Why compose lies about what you have not seen ?", Nizami lifed his mat, and the bewildered disbeliever saw the scene Nizami was describing, a battle raging before his very eyes in the fiery words of Nizami. We, in the East, hold such fictions as the greatest facts of the history of human soul !

As regards the meaning of this all-poetic insanity, all great things of the soul have, after all, no intellectual meaning in the sense of a clever intrigue of ideas. In Japan, at places like Kamakura, the very gardens and the stone-stairs are said to have attained the Buddhahood. In such poems which, on account of their repetition, are least appreciated, I see Whitman standing beyond the borders of ordinary consciousness and seeing things in his illuminated soul, all things he names, precipitated as living images actually before him. Turkey is before him and so is India. If he says he sees St. Paul's Cathedral, the great London Dome is before him. And in that state, Walt is effusing life like a fountain, and a stream of honey flows from him. In these intense moments, when man is all soul, what does he utter at all, but a sweet insane nonsense behind which is the infinite profundity of feelings ? What do the bride and the bridegroom talk to each other in their sacred privacy on the first night of their union—a pretty babble which is perhaps the profoundest expression of their souls.

Salut Shahnama Monde is a vision like that of Nizami's

IX
THE COLOUR OF POETIC CONSCIOUSNESS

The following poems are not poems of words, but of the colour-splash of the seer's soul-consciousness bursting out in its spontaneous bliss :-

"Women sit or move to and fro, some old, some young,
The young are beautiful, but the old are more beautiful than the young."

("By the Roadside," 'Beautiful Women' ")

This reminds me of the Sikh saint, Sawaya Singh of Amritsar, of whose inner life Bhai Vir Singh, our poet, has sung to us. He was for many years of youth a pure bachelor, engaged in his spontaneous Remembrance of the Guru. His mother, an old lady, wished him to marry. He agreed on the condition that his mother would let him marry a maiden of his choice. To this, his mother agreed, as she had thought the saint would on no condition agree to marry. Saint Sawaya Singh went and picked up a low-caste, cripple maiden and married her. He served her the whole life, nursed her, fed her, bathed her, and clothed her with his own hands every morning for many years of his life. To saint Sawaya Singh, she was as divinely beautiful as any of the loveliest maidens of the town.

And in a similar strain of the sweetness of his own intoxicated soul are Walt Whitman's poems. For

example, in "The Sleepers" he has become a blissful moonlight that goes kissing with that exquisite silver dream all that sleep.

The married couple sleep calmly in their bed, he with his palm on the hip of the wife, and she with her palm on the hip of her husband
The sisters sleep lovingly side by side in their bed,
The men sleep lovingly side by side in theirs
And the mother sleeps with her little child carefully wrept.

("The Sleepers")

I go from bedside to bedside, I sleep close with the other sleepers each in turn,
I dream in my dream all the dreams of the other dreamers,
— — — — ("The Sleepers")
Give me the splendid silent sun with all his beams full-dazzling,
Give me juicy autumal fruit ripe and red from the orchard,
Give me a field where the unmowed grass grows,
Give me an arbor, give me the trellis'd grape,
Give me fresh corn and wheat, give me serene-moving animals teaching content,
Give me nights perfectly quiet as on high plateaus west of the Mississippi, and I looking up at the stars.
Give me odorous at sunrise a garden of beautiful flowers where I can walk undisturb'd,
Give me for marriage a sweet breath'd woman of whom I should never tire
Give me a perfect child, give me away aside

from the noise of the world a rural domestic life,
Give me to warble spontaneous songs recluse by myself, for my own ears only,
Give me solitude, give me Nature, give me again O Nature your primeval sanities

("Drum-Taps")

We have in the *Guru Grantha* a peasant song of the same strain :

Give me a cow whose udders are full of milk,
Give me wheatflour, give me fat,
Give me a good wife, give me a fine mare,
Give me a pinch of salt hard,
Give me the pretty little joy of life,

And let me ache with remembrance of Thy Beat.

Loafe with me on the grass, loose the stop from your throat,
Nor words, nor music or rhyme I want, not custom or lecture, not even the best,
Only the lull I like, the hum of your valved voice

("Song of Myself," Section 5)

The big doors of the country barn stand open and ready,
The dried grass of the harvest-time loads the slow-drawn wagon,
The clear light plays on the brown gray and green intertinged,
The armfuls are pack'd to the sagging mow.
I am there, I help, I came stretch'd atop of the load,
I felt its soft jolts, one leg reclined on the other,

I jump from the cross-beams and seize the clover, and timothy,
And roll head over heels and tangle my hair full of wisps

("Song of Myself," Section 9.)

"Who goes there ? hankering, gross, mystical, nude
How is it that I extract strength from the beef I eat
What is a man anyhow ? what am I ? what are you ?

("Song of Myself," Section 20)

I think I could turn, and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contain'd,
I stand and look at them long and long.

("Song of Myself," Section 32)

Do I contradict myself ?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

("Song of Myself," Section 51)

No labor-saving machine,
Nor discovery have I made,
Nor will I be able to leave behind me any wealthy bequest to found a hospital or library,
Nor reminiscence of any dead of courage for America,
Nor literary success nor intellect, nor book for the book-shelf,
But a few carols vibrating through the air I leave,
For comrades and lovers.

("Calamus," 'No Labor Saving Machine')

I see the sleeping babe nestling the breast of its mother,
The sleeping mother and babe—hush'd, I study them long and long.

("By the Roadside" 'Mother And Babe')

"Through the ample open door of the peacful country barn,
A sunlit pasture field with cattle and horses feeding,
And haze and vista and the far horizon fading away.

("By the Roadside" 'A Farm Picture')

"Sail forth—steer for the deep waters only,
Reckless, O soul, exploring, I with thee and thou with me,
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all
O My brave soul !
O farther farther sail !
O daring joy, but safe ! are they not all the seas of God ?
O farther farther, farther sail !"

("Passage to India," Section 9)

O to bathe in the swimming-bath, or in a good place along shore,
To splash the water ! to walk ankle-deep, or race naked along the shore.

("A Song of Joys")

X

THE BODY AND THE SOUL

There are many frequent *announcements* made by Walt as to the relation of body and soul. At times he cannot distinguish between the two. At others he says the body is the soul. To him the soul is not a concept. It is a reality even after death. Our Gurus too at places grow so fervent about the body that it comes to us, the disciples, in those memorable words of theirs as identical with the soul. "Great are the horses on which the Disciples living in inspiration go riding. Blessed is their merchandise that they carry on them. Blessed their festive board." Do not abandon yourself. Eat the Bread, for out of the wheaten bread well-digested comes even the ecstatic taste of the word, The Name. *Remember the Divine with the loaf of bread.*"

But apart from such correspondences which could be still further traced, it seems the Gurus have laid great emphasis on feeding the soul, nourishing the soul and keeping the soul hale. This emphasis and the daily practice of bathing in the infinite not once in the morning and once in the evening, but bathing in the wholeness of divine rapture all breaths of one's life, asleep or awake, sitting or standing, inactive or active,are like the luminous nimbus that must surround all the disciples, and they should live, move and have

their being in it. The old Brahmans of India thought and the Brahman of all Brahmans, the great and rare Vedanta apostle, Shankaracharya, declared that "Knowledge Divine is Freedom" And what is that "Divine Knowledge"? To know, "I am the Brahman". A philosophic state of mind is all that was necessary to break the illusion of the body and to be the soul. There can be no "souls", "shapes", so to say, in this old Vedanta philosophy. There is but one soul. And bodies are what conceal the reality of the soul. All formed objects are unreal. And hence it is by breaking away from the body that one gets to the soul. And the body can be broken and the "wheel of birth and death" stopped, as soon as one knows that it is all one. So did the Hindu philosopher founder in the bog, and led all his people to the Silunan lakes, as did Hindenburgh in respect of the Russian armies in the first stages of the Great War ! For they hated to believe that the soul is as real as that it needs as much looking after as the body. By "thinking away", life cannot cease to function. And the death of mind does not mean the end of one's soul.

Born with such interfed proclivities in India, for the Gurus to rise and to declare that the disciples must feed their soul and *maintain* it in divine atmosphere by doing as much physical work for it as one has to do for the body, tells about the Gurus more than one can say.

Guru Nanak says, "As they wash clothes with soap,so has one to wash one's soul-consciousness of its gathered daily dirt with the Song of *Nam*. The Song of *Nam* can wash it."

To the Gurus, therefore, the soul is as real as the body. The body is real. The soul is real. The objects are real. Continents are real. Nature is real. The stars are real. Worlds other than this are real.

No old theory of *maya* conquers the mind of the Gurus; nor are they tempted that way. The soul must be fed, even if with fish, as we find Christ after resurrection, feeling hungry. Walt Whitman's body and soul are spoken of in the spirit of the Great Sikh Masters ;

Think of the soul
I swear to you that body of your gives proportion to your soul somehow to live in other spheres;
I don't know how, but I know is so"
How can the real body ever die and be buried ?
Behold, the body includes and is the meaning, the main concern, and includes and is the soul;

("Starting from Paumanok," Section 13)

XI

THE GREAT TRUTH

In conclusion, let me declare, that the religion of Guru Nanak is not these miserable ethics, these ideas of good and bad and nobility, these conventions of purity and impurity, these wayside no-truths and half-truths to which the uninspired cling with such stupid and universal tenacity, not those steps to perfection counted like the rungs of a ladder, not those catalogues of do's and dont's, not those hotch-potch, foolish theologies of the human race, not those human qualities that these unregenerated animals in various multi-coloured faces have been holding in great esteem so long, and still hug close to their prejudices, not those great wastes of human energy and feeling involved in institutionizing personal charities, in fact, nothing of what men and women think so far is religion.

The religion of Guru Nanak is one thing needful, to the soul of the individual, as well as the soul of groups of individuals. Nature is God. It is personal, alive with feeling. It is a reservoir of inexhaustible life, inspiration and love. Nature "red in tooth and claw" is misunderstood as such. Nature that feeds the worms born in the clefts of rocks, is fond of life, is jealous of it, is in mad love with it. It is the sole Reality before us, behind us, within us,

beyond us. And man who lives as a river of love that flows not from any far-off place, but from Nature surrounding him, as water surrounds fish, is religious, no other. "Acceptance," "Amazement," "Spirituality of Things" are Guru Nanak's exact words. Religion is function of life as it is driven to function.

Now if a thousand perfect men were to appear it would not amaze me,
Now if a thousand beautiful forms of women appear'd it would not astonish me.
Now I see the secret of the making of the best persons,
It is to grow in the open air and to eat and sleep with the earth.

("Song of the Open Road," Section 6,)

Walt does not indicate the secret at all. Here his voice becomes faint and unauthoritative, as of an unauthorised disciple. He only suggests. But Guru Nanak gives out the secret in the illumination of the Disciple-consciousness by the incoming of the Guru consciousness, a cosmic phenomenon, in which Nature manifests itself as God, and not as a Demon "red in tooth and claw." And this, illumination comes exactly with a similar surprise with which the showers of aurora fall on the North and South poles. There is no opening of the secret possible by going "to grow in the open air and to eat and sleep with the earth". Illumination first, and this or other ways of intimacy with Nature as God and in breathing and outbreathing power, beauty, and ecstasy of the great cosmic spirit, afterwards. To Mary, the sinner uninspired,

Nature and this "open air" and earth have not that meaning, which they have for the illumined Mary when she gets the live-grain of life. To Martha it is different, to Mary it is different. Religion is what Mary had from Christ; it is a substance of life; it is vital and sensitive. It is the life of Spirit set aglow by the Personal God. It is very rare, but rarity is an element of the preciousness of the personal truth of life and love. This Truth is His gift; it comes as a rare inspiration; it is genius. So say the Gurus. But you must toil for it, day and night, just to live It is like burning a taper and waiting through the night for the Dawn of His Love and Grace to turn upon you.

XII

THE NASCENT SPIRIT OF POESY

Few allow us to enter their very soul. It is only the sure poet who imparts himself to us. Things that are merely singable are not necessarily true poetry, even inarticulate, but musical songs are singable in most exquisite manners in the voice of a great musician. Where do we go after hearing such music or poetry ? If we go out of it, we have not yet met the poet. The perfection of the spirit of poesy lies in the omnipresent and everlasting climate of the angelic presence of the poet. He is one companion even beyond death, nearer than our own soul. He is the indweller. It is like finding an everlasting residence in a delectable paradise, transcendent and glorious beyond our utter choices. We in the East pour our soul before this manifestation of the inspired Divinity in man. Finding him nothing else remains to be found. When sick and sorry and broken, we return to him to be made whole once again. He is our Healer. Unnecessary and unmiraculous is the healing of our body and mind; truly miraculous and most essential is the healing of the spirit of man. The poet dives deep into us. While merely touching us with his hand, or merely casting a benignant look at us, he has gone and healed our spirit. We meet him, may be, after the gloom of many centuries, but it is

worth it.

The flowing rivers cannot keep their margins smooth, nor the sea waves confine themselves to the contours. There is music in the storm that blows in the snow blizzards. There is a poem that the north winds sing, blowing through the pine forests. There is a metre in the ruin and dissolution of all great things.

At midnight, once I slept on the roof of a kind man, as a mere way farer whom he fed. It was a dirty sheet he gave me to cover myself from the bite of the mosquitoes. That was his best sheet. I slept in it, tired as I was. I was wrapped in a poverty-stricken kindness. When the whole city was asleep, it seemed, as though the brick building too had slept. In that moon-lit midnight silence, I was awakened by a loving woman with her gentle caress. I felt it like the touch of Heaven. It was the woman of Heaven that came and touched me in the gentle cool breeze of the mid-September Punjab. I felt as if she had pelted me softly with Damascan roses. I felt the deliria of an altogether new life stealing over me. There in that saved privacy of some unknown companionship of the September breeze, I felt, I had touched the nascent spirit of poesy. And I turned mute with utter sweetness. I was made helpless by the intense affection of the radiant moon-filled breeze. No amorous dalliance with any pretty woman could be ever so subjective as this midnight dalliance. It soothed my soul consciousness; it repaired my broken soul. Something like this experience, when thrown upon myself in the absolute loveliness of my soul, is

what, we in the East, know as poetry. The latter is not a question of a new rhyme, or the drawing of more pleasure, but the very food of our soul.

I always think that a line, a broken line can sustain me for ever while the gilt-edged volumes are worthless I feel when reading my *Guru Grantha* that a line comes with hands and feet and holds me, as did that night the great mystic breeze, and pours into me something I know not, or takes me along to the Realm of the Celestials, I know not, and I feel satisfied. It seems I meet Him, I know not. But this nascent spirit of poesy becoming a person and filling me with His Presence divine is what I hold as the work of the true artist and the true poet All art below this divine, vital and living effect is but an illusive misnomer. People have discussed the merits of Walt Whitman as a poet, and many have dismissed his claims as a poet of any fresh musical fineness. His lines, they aver ,do not rhym weell; his words, at places, are uneven and uncouth ! He indulges, sitting in his window, in endless naming of mere things, and what he considers a poem is but a catalogue of the names of cities and things and races !

But Walt Whitman responds to my spirit of receiving a kiss of the soul. I am the one with a golden begging bowl. I do not earn. I do not believe in it, not even in the daily bread, no, not even the bread for my soul ! They may say I contradict the modern spirit where beggars are outlawed, but I insist upon living and begging from door to door. If a man refuses me bread, the sun-lit gates of Nature open, and I roam in those eternal cities of light where begging

perhaps is the highest culmination of all true art and religion. Where dwell, as says Guru Nanak, "the powerful ones," and they sustain all who "knock" at their door.

Do not know me as a man clad in silk and gold. I am in rags. I do not count upon my honour and self-respect; to me these are petty trifles. Who insults me ? My brother, my lover, my benefactor ! What does it matter ? As long as the red glow of my eye, intoxicated by the play of midnight breeze in my soul, is not affected, I believe in wandering from door to door and begging my loaf from those beautiful women bejewelled with divine grace, from those soul-lit figures, high, and buoyant and youthful, smiling at me. They give me flowers, they give me fruits; they give me new glances; they give me the sight of themselves all that seems me, and I move on ! At times, I remember an enchanting face of mystery for days, as once Mona Lisa charmed Leonardo da Vince !

I get a similar reponse from a line here and a line there in Walt Whitman, and I, therefore, hold that the quality of his verse is essentially spiritual. It transcends the business of body and mind, and refuses to be weighed by our weights and measures of metres and rhymes and dances and tunes, and such daily routines, calculated to excite thoughts in us. At times, I halt on the edge of the stream flowing out of him, and look at the flow for hours and hours. At times, a line, just one line, strikes me as a complete poem.

Sometimes, the titles of his poems are, in themselves, greater poems than the lines bound like a

golden sheaf of ripe wheat ears below. Then the title is poetry, and the lines, but the daily bread. "The Voice of the Rains", "The Sobbing of the Bells", "The Sun of Peace", "When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom'd", "Proud Music of the Storm"—what a bouquet of titles ! To us in the Punjab, where every new bride, till recently, used to wear a mirror in a silver ring on her right thumb, and where the Vendanta philosophy makes of this universe but a mirror of same great spiritual reality, the title, "A Hand Mirror", given to one of his poems excites us to a strange admiration. How like a Punjabi Vedantist, Walt has taken the mirror out of a bride's hand and made it as ymbol !

Again, "As I Sat Alone By Blue Ontario's Shores" reveals his soul by saying nothing more to us: "Look down Fair Moon". "O Tan-faced Prairie Boy," "Give me the Splendid Silent Sun", "Beat, Beat Drums", "That Shadow my Likeness", "I am He that aches with Love", "One Hour to Madness and Joy", "A Woman Waits for Me", "That Music always round Me."—what are these, but complete poems !

Great indeed is the God—intoxication of the spirit of Whitman when he can suggest so much in lines like these:

How curious ! how real !
Underfoot the divine soil, overhead the sun.
("Starting from Paumanok")

"Splendour of ended day floating and filling me,
Hour prophetic, hour resuming the past."
("Songs of Parting")

In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to

time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.
"By the Roadside" (When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer)

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse no will,
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,
("Memories of President Lincoln")

O rising stars !
Perhaps the one I want so much will rise, will rise with some of you".
"Sea-Drift" (Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking)

Others may praise what they like;
But I, from the banks of the running Missouri, praise nothing in art or aught else,
Till it has well inhaled the atmosphere of this river, also the Western prairie scent,
And fully exudes it all again.

And do not the following sayings of Walt sit together under the blue sky shining in the spirit of Rama Krishna Parmahansa ?

What am I after all but a child, pleas'd with the sound of my own name ? repeating it over and over;
I stand apart to hear—it never tires me.
To you your name also;
Did you think there was nothing but two or three

pronunciations in the sound of your name ?
(Autumn Rivulets)

I say that the real and permanent grandeur of these States must be their religion,
Otherwise there is no real and permanent grandeur;
(Nor character nor life worthy the name without religion,
Nor land nor man or woman without religion.)
I say no man has ever yet been half devout enough,
None has ever yet adored or worship'd half enough,
None has begun to think how divine he himself is, and how certain the future is.
(Starting from Paumanok)

It is a painful thing to love a man or woman to excess, and yet it satisfies, it is great,
But there is something else very great, it makes the whole coincide,
It, magnificent, beyond materials, with continuous hands, sweeps and provides for all.

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems.

A child said *What is the grass* ? fetching it to me with full hands;
How could I answer the child ? I do not know what it is any more than he.

All truths wait in all things,
They neither hasten their own delivery nor resist it,

Logic and sermons never convince,
The damp of the night drives deeper into my soul.

Space and Time ! now I see it is true, what I guessed at,
What I guess'd when I loafed on the grass,
What I guess'd while I lay alone in my bed,
And again as I walk'd the beach
under the paling stars of the morning.

I understand the large hearts of heroes,
The courage of present times and all times,
— — — — — — — —
I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there.

O despairer, here is my neck,
By God, you shall not go down ! hang your whole weight upon me.

Long enough have you dream'd contemptible dreams,
Now I wash the gum from your eyes,
You must habit yourself to the dazzle of the light and of every moment of your life.

I have said that the soul is not more than the body,
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,

And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his own funeral, drest in his shroud,

In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the glass,
I find letters from God dropt in the street, and

every one is signed by God's name,
(Song of Myself)

What a spirit of the spiritual is there in the following :

The soft voluptuous opiate shades,
The sun just gone, the eager light dispell'd-(I too will soon be gone dispell'd)
A haze-nirwana-rest and night-oblivion."
("Twilight")

Simple and fresh and fair from winter's close emerging,
As if no artifice of fashion, business, politics, had ever been,
Forth from its sunny nook of shelter'd grass innocent golden, calm as the dawn,
The spring's first dandelion shows its trustful face.
("The First Dandelion")

This is thy love O Soul, thy free flight into the wordless,
Away from books, away from art, the day erased, the lesson done,
Thee fully forth emerging, silent, gazing, pondering the themes thou lovest best.
Night, sleep, death and stars.
("A Clear Midnight")

How this statement finds an exact echo in Bhai Vir Singh's last poem in the collection called *Nargas !*

A thousand perfect men and women appear,
Around each gathers a cluster of friends, and gay children and youths, with offerings.

To grace the bush I love--to sing with the birds,
A warble for joy of lilac-time, returning in reminiscence.

("offerings")